# Table of Contents


1. Cats of the Clans
2. Chapter 1
3. Chapter 2
4. Chapter 3
5. Chapter 4
6. Chapter 5
7. Chapter 6
8. Chapter 7
9. Chapter 8
10. Chapter 9
11. Chapter 10
12. Chapter 11
13. Chapter 12
14. Chapter 13
15. Chapter 14
16. Chapter 15
17. Chapter 16

# Cats of the Clans

**MOUNTAINCLAN**

***Leader***

**Eaglestar** light brown tom with a white chest and amber eyes

***Deputy***

**Poppyheart** tortoiseshell she-cat with leaf-green eyes

***Medicine Cat***

**Addertail** dark grey tabby she-cat with a white tail and yellow eyes

***Warriors***

**Shatteredfang** jet-black tom with with white ear tips, yellow eyes, and a cracked tooth

**Icepetal** white she-cat with ice-blue eyes

**Apprentice: Rainpaw**

**Dappleshine** spotted ginger -and-white tom with one blue eye and one yellow

**Goldenspiral** golden-and-white she cat with soft-blue eyes

**Softsong** ginger tabby tom with green eyes

**Bramblepelt**- fluffy tabby tom with amber eyes

**Flowersting** pale ginger she-cat with green eyes

**Duskwhisper** dark grey tom with amber eyes

**Apprentice: Owlpaw**

**Clovergaze** ginger she-cat with green eyes

**Tinypuddle** small grey-blue tom with deep blue eyes

**Thistlejaw** silver tabby tom with spiky fur and light-blue eyes

**Pebbleclaw** black tom with amber eyes

***Apprentices***

**Rainpaw** tortoiseshell she-cat with green eyes

**Owlpaw** brown tabby tom with white paws and yellow eyes

***Queens***

**Robinheart** calico she-cat with green eyes (mother to Pebbleclaw's kit, Shadekit)

**Froststrike** white she-cat with yellow eyes (mother to Thistlejaw's kits Emberkit, Dustkit, and Harekit)

**Silverflower** beautiful silver and white she-cat with blue eyes (expecting Tinypuddle's kits)

***Elders***

**Hazelflash** tan tom with green eyes

**BOULDERCLAN**

***Leader***

**Berrystar** black-and-white she-cat with yellow eyes

***Deputy***

**Redwater** reddish-brown tom with amber eyes

***Medicine cat***

**Smokewisp** dark grey tabby tom with deep blue eyes

Warriors

**Sagestem** white she-cat with pale green eyes

**Frogsplash** grey and tan tortoiseshell tom with yellow eyes

**Quietpounce** muscular tan-and-white she-cat with light blue eyes

**Meadowbreeze** cream tabby tom with brown eyes

**Apprentice: Rockypaw**

**Thornberry** brown tabby tom with green eyes

**Mumblebelly** goldenish-brown she-cat with amber eyes

**Tangleclaw** black she-cat with green eyes

**Lizardleg** brown tabby tom with white and yellow eyes

**Dewyfeather** black tabby she-cat with white

**Apprentice: Timberpaw**

**Shrewnose** light brown tom with long muzzle and pale amber eyes

**Snailflight** brown tom with yellow eyes

**Tansyleaf** tortoiseshell she-cat with small white patches and green eyes

**Runningwater** very light grey she-cat with white and blue eyes

***Apprentices***

**Timberpaw** light tabby tom with light green eyes

**Rockypaw** dark grey tom with blue eyes

***Queens***

**Featherflower** silver she-cat with white streaks and yellow eyes (mother to Meadowbreeze's kits Tigerkit, Sunkit, Beekit, and Puddlekit)

***Elders***

**Petaldapple** ginger tom with yellow eyes

**CREEKCLAN**

***Leader***

**Halfstar** pale ginger she-cat with green eyes and half of one ear missing

***Deputy***

**Leopardsong** white she-cat with small black spots and green eyes

***Medicine Cat***

**Minnowleap** old black-and-white she-cat with yellow eyes

**Apprentice Copperpaw** fluffy orange tom with white underbelly and yellow eyes

***Warriors***

**Silentstream** white she-cat with amber eyes

**Apprentice: Lightpaw**

**Snowbelly** dark brown tabby tom with white underbelly and blue eyes

**Troutswipe** cream fluffy tom with deep green eyes

**Brokenfall** ginger tabby tom with green eyes

**Apprentice: Littlepaw**

**Leaftail** pale tortoiseshell she-cat with white muzzle and underbelly with amber eyes

**Honeydapple** pale orange she-cat with white paws and yellow eyes

**Brackencall** golden-brown tom with amber eyes

**Briarberry** dark brown tabby tom with yellow eyes

**Daisywing** silver she-cat with white stripes and blue eyes

**Tallwhisker** black tom with white chest and green eyes

**Doveheart** grey she-cat with a white spot on chest and green-yellow eyes

**Apprentice: Yarrowpaw**

**Rushingfoot** fast tortoiseshell she-cat with light green eyes and a scarred muzzle

**Wolfswoop** almost black tabby tom with a white underbelly and muzzle and blue eyes

**Apprentice: Aspenpaw**

***Apprentices***

**Lightpaw** black-and-white tom with yellow eyes

**Littlepaw** small light grey she-cat with darker stripes and green eyes

**Yarrowpaw** silver she-cat with white chest, paws, and muzzle and light blue eyes

**Aspenpaw** black tom with green eyes

***Queens***

**Sheeptuft** white she-cat with two black paws and brown eyes

***Elders***

**Ravencroak** black tom with yellow eyes

**Toadsplash** brown tabby tom with white underbelly and amber eyes

# Chapter 1

Shadekit snuggled closer to her mother's belly. A milky scent filled the young kit's nostrils. Shadekit detected something else. Sadness and anger poured from her mother. Fallingkit and Mousekit, Shadekit's littermates, died as soon as they were born. Suddenly a loud sigh came from her mother.

"Fallingkit and Mousekit are probably wishing you well from StarClan," the white queen, Froststrike comforted.

Shadekit opened her eyes, it wasn't her first time, but she had only first opened them the day before.

"Yea," Robinheart, her mother, spat, "*probably*."

"You still have Shadekit to look after, you don't want to lose her too, do you?" Froststrike asked with an edge to her voice.

"Why would I care," Robinheart hissed bitterly. "Pebbleclaw doesn't care." Robinheart stood up, purposefully knocking Shadekit off her belly.

Shadekit let out a pitiful whimper. "That hurt," She squeaked. *Why doesn't she like me?*

Froststrike growled then called, "Emberkit, come here!"

A few moments later the ginger she-kit's head poked in the cave. "Yes?"

"Take Shadekit outside with you to play," Froststrike ordered.

Emberkit seemed to detect something in her mother's voice, because she didn't ask any questions. "Come on Shadekit, let's go play Battle with Dustkit and Harekit."

Shadekit stumbled miserably after Emberkit. Thoughts whirled

through her small mind. They soon got out of the den, and Dustkit and Harekit were waiting.

"Did you get in trouble?" Harekit asked, bounding up to Emberkit.

"What did you do?" Dustkit asked almost at the same time, catching up to Harekit.

Emberkit sat down, confusion lit in her eyes. "Froststrike is angry," She announced.

Dustkit's eyes widened. "You must have done something terrible!" He squeaked.

"Yea," Harekit breathed. "Froststrike's never mad."

Emberkit's yellow eyes rested on Shadekit. "I didn't get in trouble, it was Shadekit."

Shadekit felt herself shrink under the burning of stares as the other two kits looked at her.

"What did you do?" Dustkit asked, his eyes glowing as if nothing bad happened.

"Did you put a thorn in Froststrike's nest?" Harekit asked, his fur fluffed.

"I-I..." She trailed off, her eyes shut tightly, her tiny claws digging into the earth.

The other kits' eyes burned into her again, heating her pelt.

"I did nothing!" Shadekit wailed. She opened her eyes, her vision was slightly blurred.

Cats in the clearing looked at the four kits.

"Everything alright?" A ginger she-cat named Clovergaze asked.

Shadekit stared at Clovergaze, eyes blazing. "No," She spat. "Nothing is *alright*"

Shadekit felt Clovergaze's tail run down her spine. "Come with me, little one," The she-cat murmured.

Reluctant at first, Shadekit followed. As they walked, not a cat spoke. They sat down under a shady tree.

"What happened?" Clovergaze asked, her tone was serious.

"Robinheart is mean!" Shadekit hissed, her tiny tail lashing. *Stop asking me about this!*

"What did she do?" Clovergaze asked another question.

"She said she doesn't care how *I* feel, she only cares about how Fallingkit and Mousekit feel!" Shadekit let out a wail and left Clovergaze by herself. She crouched in a small bush. An orange shape came running towards her.

"Come on, Shadekit," Emberkit mewed sympathetically. "Let's play Battle."

.....

Shadekit let out a yawn as she awoke. "I'm hungry!" She complained. She snuggled closer to Froststrike's belly.

"Robinheart will feed you soon." Froststrike tried to comfort Shadekit, but her voice was dry.

"Yea, whatever," Came a snort from Robinheart. "Just hurry you little scrap."

Shadekit tumbled blindly over to Robinheart. She quickly fed and fled away before Robinheart hurt her. Suddenly a tongue rasped over her ear.

"Don't worry, Shadekit, I won't let Robinheart hurt you," Froststrike soothed. "Go outside and play now."

Shadekit hesitated before standing up. She padded slowly out of the den, letting her eyes adjust to the bright sunhigh light. She saw Emberkit, Harekit, and Dustkit playing a game, but decided to leave

them alone. *Maybe I should explore...* Shadekit spotted a cave in the side of the mountain. She bounded excitedly over to the cave, slowing down as she got to the entrance. She poked her head in and saw nests on the ground. *Who sleeps here?* Shadekit wondered. She went all the way in and sniffed the next. Cat scent was fresh on her nose.

"Looking for someone?" A voice asked form behind Shadekit.

Shadekit nearly jumped out of her fur. She whipped around. "W-who are you?" She squeaked.

The cat let out a purr of amusement. "Just Addertail, MountainClan's medicine cat."

Shadekit took a step closer to see that the she-cat's tail was pure white while the rest of her was a dark grey. "You're the medicine cat?" Shadekit asked, tilting her head.

"I am," The she-cat purred. "I could show you around if you like." Addertail began to pad deeper into the cave.

Shadekit followed. Suddenly they halted.

"This is where the herbs are stored," Addertail informed.

"Can you teach me some herbs?" Shadekit asked excitedly.

A surprised expression lit up Addertail's face. "Of course!" She purred with delight. She padded up to a pile of large leaves. "These leaves are dock," She explained. "It's good for sore pads and scratches."

Shadekit's eyes widened as she looked at the tangy smelling leaf. "Dock," She repeated slowly.

"This plant is feverfew." Addertail pointed a paw at the plant. "It's good for fevers and headaches."

Small white flowers with a yellow inside. Shadekit touched a paw to the leaves and noticed they were soft. "Feverfew," She breathed.

Addertail's eyes shone with satisfaction. "One more," She said, padding over to small, black seeds. "These are poppy seeds," She told Shadekit. "It makes a cat sleepy, and it eases pain and distress."

"Wow," Shadekit breathed. "This is amazing!" She gave a small bounce. "I can't wait to tell Froststrike what I learned!" She squealed. "She'll be so impressed!" Shadekit ran off, a smile spreading across her face. At that moment Shadekit knew exactly what she wanted to do. She wanted to be a medicine cat.

# Chapter 2

Shadekit stretched. Three moons had passed, and two more kits were born. They were Frozenkit and Lostkit. She saw Emberkit, Harekit, and Dustkit talking excitedly outside the nursery. She padded over to them. "Hi," She greeted.

"Hi, Shadekit!" Dustkit purred.

"Can you believe that we're being made apprentices today?" Harekit mewed gleefully.

Suddenly, movement caught Shadekit's attention, and she noticed the light brown leader, Eaglestar. He jumped and landed gracefully on the highledge.

"All cats old enough to fight their own battles, gather here beneath the highledge!" The leader's call echoed off the trees.

Bushes rustled as cats emerged from their dens and settled into the clearing.

Froststrike and Thistlejaw sat proudly in the front, their kits were neatly groomed.

"Dustkit, Emberkit, and Harekit, please step forward," Eaglestar ordered.

The three kits obeyed.

"Bramblepelt, Flowersting, and Softsong, You are all experienced warriors, and I expect you to pass on your knowledge to these young cats." Eaglestar paused, his gaze glittering with amusement as he saw the soon-to-be apprentices quivering with excitement. "Bramblepelt, your apprentice will be Dustpaw; Flowersting, you will mentor Harepaw; and Softsong, you will mentor Emberpaw,"

He announced.

The clan broke into cheering. "Harepaw!"

"Dustpaw!"

"Emberpaw!"

"This meeting is dismissed!" Eaglestar declared, jumping off the ledge.

Shadekit ran up to her old denmates. "Congratulations!" She purred.

"Thanks!" Harepaw said, puffing out his chest.

Dustpaw hopped up to Harepaw's side. "Yea!" He exclaimed. "We're gonna fight in battles!"

Emberpaw rolled her eyes. "We aren't warriors yet." She laughed. "It won't be long before you're an apprentice," Emberpaw pointed out. "We'll be able to train with each other!"

Shadekit shook her head. "I'm going to be a medicine cat apprentice!"

The new apprentices' eyes widened.

"Wow," Dustpaw spoke up after a moment of silence. "That's amazing!"

"Really?" Emberpaw breathed, excitement in her eyes.

"You'll be able to treat us if we get injured," Harepaw said.

"Obviously," Shadekit said under her breath. "Anyway, hope you have fun doing whatever it is you're doing today," She meowed, raising her voice. She padded away towards the nursery, where Frozenkit and Lostkit were playing.

"Hey, Shadekit!" Lostkit greeted, his stumpy tail waving happily.

"Wanna play Catch The Mouse?" Frozenkit asked.

Shadekit shook her head. "No thanks, maybe later?" Shadekit had more important things to do.

"OK," was all Frozenkit said back.

Shadekit crept slowly to the entrance of the warriors' den where her father sat. She began to feel dizzy as she neared him.

It was clear that Pebbleclaw saw her, because he turned so his back was facing her.

The kit felt something stir inside her stomach, but she still got closer to her father.

"I know you're there," The loud, deep voice of her father broke her thoughts. "Sulking in the shadows won't do anything." Pebbleclaw turned to face her. His pelt was pitch black like Shadekit's, and their eyes where an identical amber.

Shadekit took a deep breath of air. "I-I just wanted to say hello to my father," She stuttered. She felt herself tremble.

Pebbleclaw's ear flicked. "That's not all," He growled softly, his eyes narrowing into slits. "What else do you want to tell me?"

Shadekit wanted to run away, but she knew she had to tell Pebbleclaw. "I want to be a m-medicine cat, not a warrior," She announced at last.

Surprise lit Pebbleclaw's gaze. "Why are you telling me this?" He hissed at last, rage replacing surprise. Shadekit saws his claws dig into the ground. "Shouldn't you be talking to your mother *Robinheart* about that?" He spat Robinheart's name like a piece of crowfood.

Shadekit took a step back. "I don't want to talk to her about this," She admitted. She felt her fur begin to fluff at the thought of Robinheart knowing her interest in herbs. "I wanted *you* to tell Robinheart instead of me." She sat down, her tail flicking nervously as she waited for Pebbleclaw to reply.

Panic flared through his eyes for a heartbeat, but it quickly turned

back to anger before she could be sure. "Why?" His voice was as hard as ice.

"Robinheart would kill me if she found out I wanted to be a medicine cat instead of a warrior!" She wailed. "Robinheart already doesn't like me."

Pebbleheart's tail whisked close to Shadekit's shoulder, but never touched. "I will try to talk to her, but I can't promise a good response." He hissed, although Shadekit could detect a hint of sympathy in his voice.

Shadekit watched as her father padded over to the warrior's den where Robinheart was laying. She headed over to the fresh-kill pile and picked up a small mouse. She gulped it down and waited a few heartbeats before Pebbleclaw returning, his pelt ruffled. Shadekit fought the strong urge to run away.

Pebbleclaw's expression was almost impossible to read. "I did it," he growled.

Shadekit forced herself to look into his blazing eyes. "W-what did she say," she stuttered. She felt herself trembling.

A low growl rose from Pebbleclaw. "Well she hated the idea of you becoming a medicine cat apprentice." He hesitated before saying, "she said you *have* to become a warrior because you ruined her life."

Shadekit looked at her father, horrified. The world seemed to whirl around, a terrible headache began to spread in her head. "W-what?" She had to of heard him wrong or something. *Or could Robinheart hate me...* She shook her head, clearing the thought, but she still felt herself shiver.

Pebbleclaw's tail touched her shoulder. "That's what she said," he meowed softly. He seemed to realize that he was being nice to her. "You told me to do this," Pebbleclaw growled again. "Don't blame this on me."

Shadekit watched as Pebbleclaw began to walk away. "Wait!" she called.

The tom turned around. "What do you want?"

"What do you think about me becoming medicine cat?" she asked nervously.

Pebbleclaw hesitated, but finally said, "I think that you should be able to decide your own future."

Shadekit still didn't feel relieved. "You didn't answer my question."

Pebbleclaw looked at her, his eyes serious. "I think you'd make a great medicine cat."

Before Shadekit could say any more, Pebbleclaw padded away. *Maybe... Just maybe Pebbleclaw has feelings for me.*

# Chapter 3

"All cats old enough to fight their own battles, gather here beneath the highledge," Eaglestar yowled, jumping up onto the ledge.

Cats began to gather around, occasionally casting glances at Shadekit.

Her fur was fluffed up, and no cat bothered to clean her before this important ceremony. She scanned the clearing and saw Pebbleclaw sit down, his eyes gave away a slight trace of pride. She looked around for her mother, and saw Silverflower forcing her in the clearing.

Eaglestar's amber eyes rested on Shadekit. "Shadekit, step forward," he summoned.

Shadekit obeyed, quivering with shock and excitement.

"Addertail, you are an experienced medicine cat, and I trust you to pass on all you know to Shadepaw."

Addertail padded over to Shadepaw. "I vow to teach my new apprentice all there is to know about being a medicine cat," She promised.

Shadepaw and Addertail touched noses, and the cats exploded into cheers.

"Shadepaw!"

"Shadepaw!"

"Shadepaw!"

Shadepaw saw Robinheart eyeing her with a cold stare. Shadepaw automatically knew she hadn't been cheering.

"Hey Shade*paw*!" A familiar voice called.

Shadepaw spun around to see Dustpaw running towards her.

"Congratulations!" He purred, his eyes shining.

Shadepaw relaxed as she realized somebody was proud. "Thanks!"

Shadepaw noticed that he was staring at Pebbleclaw and Robinheart. "I'm sorry they aren't proud," he whispered sympathetically. "I know you'll be a great medicine cat."

Shadepaw gave a weak smile. "Thanks, that helped," she said, touching her nose to his ear. "I've got to go before Addertail explodes," she purred, glancing over her shoulder at Addertail who was clawing impatiently at the ground. She padded over to Addertail.

"About time!" Addertail exclaimed, her fluffy white tail flicking. "Follow me."

Shadepaw followed Addertail into her den. She looked at the organized herbs as they padded into the storage place.

"Now," Addertail began, sweeping her tail across the floor. "Name the herbs you know.

Shadepaw inspected the plants. They all looked similar. She tried to remember when she went here as a kit. She saw tiny black seeds resting on a leaf. "Oooh!" she squeaked, her whiskers quivering with excitement. "Those are poppy seeds." Shadepaw pointed at the black seeds with a paw.

Addertail's face glowed with pride. "Correct!" Addertail fixed her eyes on Shadepaw again. "Do you remember what it's used for?" she asked.

Shadepaw made a face as she tried to remember. She stared at the poppy seeds, remembering going into the den, learning the basics of

healing. She remembered the aroma of the medicine cat's den when she took her first step in. She also remembered being surprised when Addertail spooked her. A purr bubbled up in her throat. Then, she remembered. "Poppy seeds ease pain and..." She growled to herself as she tried to remember what the tiny black seeds did. "Oh, and help a cat sleep!"

Addertail purred with amusement. "Very good."

Pride filled Shadepaw, making her sit up straighter.

"But," the grey she-cat started.

Shadepaw sighed, her shoulders sagging.

"Poppy seeds also soothe shock and distress," Addertail informed. She licked a paw and dabbed her paw at the seeds. "You usually have to lick your paw to get the poppy seeds."

Shadepaw nodded, trying to let her head capture the information. A bright flare of orange caught her attention. "Woah!" Shadepaw exclaimed. "What flower is this?"

Addertail rolled her eyes and walked over to her. "That is marigold," Addertail said, flicking an ear. "It's good for stopping infection and bleeding," she said, picking up the plant with a hooked claw.

Suddenly Bramblepelt burst into the den. "Addertail, it hurts!" He complained, limping to the medicine cat.

Addertail sat down crossly. "Great StarClan," Shadepaw heard her growl under her breath. "What is it *now*?"

Bramblepelt lifted a paw, revealing a giant thorn.

"Oh, please!" Addertail scoffed at the sight. "It's not even that big." She began lapping at the tom's paw.

Shadepaw watched with interest.

"Go get some moss and soak it in the puddle," Addertail said between laps.

Shadepaw looked over to where the moss was and dipped it in the puddle, soaking it. She placed it down.

"Now, go get some chervil and marigold and chew them into separate poultices."

Shadepaw stared at her mentor, wide-eyed. Her mind whirled. "What's chervil?"

A hiss came from the tabby warrior. "I don't want the wrong herbs."

"It's shaped like a fern with small white flowers," Addertail replied.

Shadepaw searched frantically through the herbs. Suddenly a plant with little white flowers caught her eye. She took the plant in her teeth and rushed over to Addertail.

Addertail blinked then walked over to the herb store. "That's yarrow, I need chervil," she said walking up to a plant. "This is chervil." The plant had less flowers, and they were smaller. Addertail walked back over to the complaining tom. "Now chew the marigold and chervil in a separate poultice."

Shadepaw wanted to disappear in the ground and be alone, but she obeyed her mentor. She chewed up the chervil and went over to the bright marigold.

"Now put those on Bramblepelt's wound, I already cleaned it and took the thorn out," Addertail instructed.

Shadepaw did as she was told and placed the poultices on the small hole where the thorn was.

Addertail pushed cobwebs over to Shadepaw. "Now wrap it with cobwebs."

Shadepaw obeyed and slowly wrapped Bramblepelt's paw with cobwebs.

The medicine cat turned to Bramblepelt. "You should be healed tomorrow," she purred cheerfully. "Just try staying off the paw, and don't step on anymore thorns!"

Shadepaw watched as the warrior left, then she heard a snort of amusement.

"Warriors think they're so mighty, but they can't even stand when a thorn gets in their paw!" Addertail broke out laughing. "I know I get scratched up all the time, but there's a thorn in my paw!" She mocked.

Shadepaw purred at her mentor's sense of humor. "You can only tell if a cat's a true warrior if they don't complain when there's a thorn in their paw!" she joined in, her whiskers twitching.

Addertail's tail tip touched Shadepaw's shoulder. "I can tell," she started, her eyes glowing, "I can tell that we will make a great team."

For the first time since she was born, Shadepaw felt like she had a reason to live.

Addertail's fluffy tail disappeared from her shoulder. "Go get some fresh-kill, you must be hungry," she instructed, heading towards the den entrance. "I'm going to collect some more horsetail."

Shadepaw followed Addertail out of the den. She saw Dustpaw's tabby pelt, he was carrying a large squirrel into camp. She purred and darted over to him. "Did you catch that?" she asked in awe.

Dustpaw dropped the squirrel and replied, "Yeah, all by myself!" He crouched down and slowly stalked forward. "I was on the same branch as it and...," He launched himself forward, landing neatly on his paws. "It didn't even see me coming!" He fell back on his haunches. "Even Bramblepelt couldn't do better," he purred looking across the clearing at the warrior that had had a thorn in his paw.

Shadepaw nudged him, barely making his budge. "He got a thorn in his paw, you didn't," she snorted.

Dustpaw rolled his eyes. "I bet when you saw him he was wailing like a newborn," he purred.

"Stop gossiping and give your squirrel to the elders," Harepaw snapped, walking between them.

Shadepaw watched as the white tom stomped away. "Who made dirt in his fresh-kill?" she turned to Dustpaw, whose eyes burned with anger.

Dustpaw dismissively flicked his tail. "He's just a fox-hearted piece of mouse-dung," he snarled, picking up the giant squirrel.

Shadepaw watched worriedly as Dustpaw headed over to the elders' den. She padded over to the fresh-kill pile and picked up a small mouse. She padded over to a shady spot under a tree and sat down. Loneliness chilled her bones as she bit into the mouse. The flesh was tasteless and cold.

She looked up from the mouse and saw her mother staring at her with cold green eyes with a smirk on her face. Robinheart mouthed, 'worthless.'

Shadepaw looked away, she felt herself wanting to wail to StarClan. Why had they made her life miserable?

Pawsteps sounded from in front of Shadepaw. She looked up and saw green eyes, but not friendly green eyes, but green eyes with hatred in them. "Aw, look at that, my pathetic medicine cat kit!" Robinheart snarled.

Shadepaw let out a small, pitiful whimper.

"So," The she-cat continued casually, "how does it feel to be hated by your mother and rejected by your father?"

Shadepaw stood up and looked at Robinheart in the eye. "I can manage on my own, thank you very much." She tried to sound tough, but her voice squeaked like a kit's. Shadepaw's confidence fell at once.

Robinheart scoffed. "A medicine cat *can't* manage on their own." The calico she-cat's tail whisked in front of Shadepaw's face.

"T-they can!" Shadepaw protested, lowering her head and staring at the leafy ground.

A low growl rumbled in Robinheart's throat. "Let's see about that,"

Shadepaw heard a slight mutter.

Suddenly, something hard whacked Shadepaw in the head. She looked up and saw Robinheart's unsheathed paw above her head. Something glowed in her mother's eyes that made her stomach churn. Shadepaw felt a warm liquid run down her head.

The medicine cat apprentice slowly back up. "G-get away from m-me!" She wailed. She felt herself bump into the tree behind her. A heavy weight pushed her to the ground, and to defend herself, she lashed out blindly.

"*But medicine cats can look after themselves!*" Robinheart mocked, digging her claws deeper into Shadepaw's flesh.

Shadepaw tried to wriggle free, but that only made Robinheart press harder on her shoulders, nearly crushing her. She felt the eyes of her clanmates bore into her dark fur. "Help!" she tried to screech, but it only came out as a whisper.

The weight suddenly got lifted as she heard a muted cry. Blood from her head wound got in one of her eyes, making it hard to see.

"Come on Dustpaw, unbalance her!" a familiar voice hissed.

Shadepaw felt joy well up inside her. *Harepaw!* She found the strength to stand up. She slowly turned around and saw Emberpaw, Harepaw, and Dustpaw struggling to pin Robinheart down. She limped over and stood a tail length away from her mother's face. She was shivering inside, but she didn't want to show it.

Robinheart's eyes blazed. "One day, I will get my revenge!" she snarled.

The apprentices got off of Robinheart and sat down, watching her pad away.

"Thanks for saving me," Shadepaw said, her eyes skimming the three apprentices. "Nobody else would ever help." She sighed and laid down finishing her mouse.

Emberpaw stepped forward. "We'll always help you," she promised,

her nose briefly touching her ear.

Harepaw flicked his tail. "StarClan chose a hard path for you, but you are a strong, brave individual, and we know you can work through it."

Dustpaw slowly walked over to Shadepaw and laid down next to her. "I promise you, if you are ever in trouble, one of us will be there to help you, just stay away from your parents." He gave her a reassuring lick on her cheek and slowly stood up and padded away.

# Chapter 4

Tonight was a half-moon, which meant she was traveling to the Shimmering Pond to become a true medicine cat apprentice. The day before Owlpaw and Rainpaw had received their warrior names: Owlflight and Rainflash. Shadepaw bounced happily next to Addertail, who was obviously getting irritated.

"Calm down, we're almost there," Addertail growled.

Shadepaw kept bouncing. "I just can't wait to meet the medicine cats!"She stopped in her tracks. "What if they don't like me?" Shadepaw's eyes got huge.

"They'll love you, Shadepaw." Addertail continued walking. "Now come on and I'll tell you about them.

Shadepaw slowly padded after the medicine cat, fear creeping through her, like a frightened rabbit. "W-what if Robinheart is there to ambush us?" she whimpered, flattening her ears.

Addertail stopped and got nose to nose with her apprentice. "I will not let your mother hurt you, ever," she vowed. She rasped her tongue over Shadepaw's ear, comforting her. "Not as long as I live." Addertail turned back around and started padding faster ahead. "Come on, Shadepaw, we're gonna be late!"

They finally arrived last at the Shimmering Pond. The medicine cats from the other two clans welcomed them with beckoning tails.

A dark grey tabby tom purred a welcoming. "I see you got a new apprentice, Addertail," he observed. "What's her name?"

Shadepaw stepped nervously forward, fear creeping through her fur

at the thought of Robinheart leaping out of the bushes any second and crushing her to the ground. "My name's Sh-shadepaw," she mewed weakly, shivering.

The dark tabby dipped his head, his eyes shining with amusement. "My name's Smokewisp." The tom paused for a couple heartbeats, then continued, "don't worry, we don't bite."

A black-and-white she-cat stepped forward. "We're wasting moonlight, let's hurry." She turned to Shadepaw and greeted, "my name's Minnowleap, CreekClan's  medicine cat." The older she-cat's voice was raspy, and silver furs were collected at her muzzle. She beckoned an orange tom forward, he had yellow eyes, and looked about a moon or two older than her.

He padded forward, his chest puffed out. "My name is Copperpaw, pleasure to meet you,"

Shadepaw dipped her head to the medicine cats. "I'm looking forward to knowing you all," she said, her fur flattening at getting to know their names.

Addertail walked up to the Shimmering Pond, followed by Shadepaw. "StarClan, I want you to look at this apprentice." Addertail looked at the stars through the trees. "Teach her your wisdom, and guide her paws down the right path." Addertail looked at Shadepaw in the eye. "Are you ready to share with StarClan?" Addertail question.

"I am ready," Shadepaw said confidently.

The medicine cats began to lay down on the edge of the pond.

Breath stirred in Shadepaw's ear. "Lay down and lap up a drop of water, StarClan will then share with you."

Shadepaw obeyed and laid next to her mentor. The other medicine cats were already in a deep slumber. She lowered her head and lapped up a drop of water, she felt herself drop her head and drift off.

Mist swirled at the edge of Shadepaw's vision. She turned and saw

two small kits. The kits slowly padded up to her. "Who are you?" Shadepaw demanded stepping towards them. She could begin to see through the mist and identify that one kit was orange and the other was tortoiseshell and white.

The two kits stopped in front of her.

The orange kit spoke, "We are your littermates, Shadepaw." The toms eyes hardened. "Or do you not remember us?"

Shadepaw felt resentment burn in her when she remembered how Robinheart gave up on her because they had died, but she quickly swallowed it down, nearly choking. "You're- you're Mousekit!" She turned to the tortoiseshell she-cat. "You're Fallingkit," she felt pure joy, forgetting about the resentment she had moments ago. "My littermates!"

Fallingkit reached her head up, touching her small nose to Shadepaw's chin. "Welcome to StarClan!"

Mousekit looked up at Shadepaw with serious eyes. "You have a good life right now, however harsh you think it is, it's only going to get worse."

Fallingkit exchanged a glance with Mousekit. She took a breath and then looked up at Shadepaw, her cheerful eyes went to serious like Mousekit's. "When the graceful robin sings, a storm will arise with thunder and lightning, but beware, every storm comes with a risk of flame."

Shadepaw felt her fur prickle. "W-what does that even mean?" *Is the robin Robinheart, my mother?* Shadepaw looked desperately at her dead littermates for an answer.

Mousekit and Fallingkit stepped back. "Farewell, Shadepaw," they said in sync, ignoring Shadepaw's question.

Shadepaw watched with disbelief when she saw them beginning to fade. She flattened her ears and screeched, "What does it mean!" She blinked open her eyes and found herself back by the Shimmering Pond. Frustration clawed at her, why hadn't they just

told her what it meant?

A breeze ruffled her ear fur as the voice of Mousekit repeated the prophecy, "*When the graceful robin sings, a storm will arise with thunder and lightning, but beware, every storm comes with a risk of flame.*"

Shadepaw growled and flattened her ears as she watched the other medicine cats slowly get up and stretch.

A pelt soon brushed against her, and she looked over and saw Addertail. "Let's say good-bye and head off," Addertail padded over to the oldest medicine cat, Minnowleap, and said some words Shadepaw couldn't quite make out.

Shadepaw was about to head off when she ran into orange fur.

"Watch it, mouse-brain," The cat hissed.

Shadepaw realized that she had run into Copperpaw, who was now in a fit.

Copperpaw brushed out his pelt, making him twice his original size. "I just groomed myself to perfection, now my pelt's messed up!" He began slowly lapping at his pelt again.

A low growl rumbled in Shadepaw's throat. "I'm the mouse-brain?" She took a step closer to the 'neatly groomed' tom. "I think you're the mouse-brain, you're a wild cat for StarClan's sake, only kittypets bother to groom themselves every two seconds, if they don't, their twolegs will throw them in a river and watch them drown!" she hissed, flicking her tail and walking off. She looked up and saw Addertail staring at her with angry eyes. Shadepaw swallowed, realizing what she'd done.

"Come on Shadepaw, let's go."

.....

Five days had passed since the half-moon, and Shadepaw was out looking for herbs, more specifically, lamb's ear. She had to hike up a trail in the mountains to find it.

A sharp pain suddenly hit her paw. "Ow," she hissed. She lifted her paw and saw a rock. She began licking her paw, and finding the rock, she grabbed it with her teeth and pulled. She spat it out when it came out, letting out a hiss of pain. She licked the blood off, also cleaning the wound, and limped on, careful not to touch the wound to the dirty ground.

She took only five more steps and saw a familiar plant. She brushed her paw against it, feeling the soft leaves. She quickly picked it.

After she collected a few more, she headed back to camp. Shadepaw felt a nice cool breeze blow through her fur. She relished the weak Leaf-fall sun as her dark pelt absorbed it.

"Throw him out!" A harsh hiss came from a cat as Shadepaw got back to camp.

She saw Pebbleclaw facing a scarred tom she had never seen. Shadepaw rushed over to the medicine cat den to put the lamb's ear she collected away. Addertail sat near the entrance, her eyes dark. When Addertail didn't greet her, she said, "Addertail, I got the lamb's ear we needed."

Addertail's ear flicked and she looked down at her apprentice. "Uh, yeah, good job," she meowed distractedly.

Shadepaw walked in the den and placed the herbs carefully in the correct pile. She hurried back outside, not wanting to miss the scene. She saw Emberpaw, Dustpaw, and Harepaw and padded over to them. "What happened?" she asked quietly when she reached them. She sat down next to Emberpaw.

Emberpaw flicked an ear. "A patrol found a rogue in our territory," she replied calmly.

Shadepaw's pelt fluffed. "How dare they?" She spat. Her eyes blazed with a fierce fire. She suddenly let her fur flattened, confused at her fury, she quieted.

Eaglestar padded up to Pebbleclaw and the rogue. "I will deal with him," he told her father, his voice full of authority.

Pebbleclaw's mouth opened as if he were about to argue, but he obviously thought better of it. "Very well," he agreed, dipping his head respectfully.

The brown leader then turned to the scarred tom. His eyes blazed angrily. "What were you doing in clan territory," he demanded, taking a step forward so he was nose-to-nose to the reddish-brown tom.

The tom's eyes gave away no fear, only determination. "I was hunting for my survival." He unsheathed his claws, showing long curved claws. "Now back off before somebody gets seriously injured," he spat, his eyes raking across the cats in the crowd. His gaze locked with Shadepaw.

Shadepaw felt something snap in her as she met the gaze confidentally, feeling no fear. She noticed that her father watched with amazement. She lashed her tail and bared her teeth. She was aware of the apprentices watching her, shocked.

The rogue began to walk towards her. His amber gaze still burned into her's. A low growl rumbled in the back of his throat.

Shadepaw looked at Eaglestar, whose eyes only shone with interest.

Shadepaw unsheathed her claws and dug them into the earth. All the pain and anger burned in her, along with her frustration. *I can take on this mangy tom!*

Robinheart stared at her with excitement in her eyes. She mouthed, 'wimpy medicine cat.'

Determination flared through her as she stood up, her mother's glares full of hatred burned through her mind. Blinded by anger, she launched herself at the tom, who was taken by surprise. She lashed out a paw and hit him on the chin, barely hitting.

The tom reared and slammed down on her, crushing her spine.

Her mind flashed back to when Robinheart had attacked, when she had been crushed to the ground.

Foul breath stirred in her ear. "Give in," the rogue snarled. His claws dug deeper in her flesh, making her screech with pain.

Shadepaw caught Dustpaw's eye, he seemed to be frozen with horror. 'Help," she mouthed, hoping he understood.

Dustpaw's eyes suddenly snapped into fury. "Hey mange-pelt, come get me!"

Shadepaw felt claws unhook from her pelt. She stood up, shaking. She looked at Eaglestar, his eyes shone with uncertainty, but she turned back to the fight. She watched as Dustpaw neatly dived under the tom's belly, she then saw how he crunched down on his lashing tail.

The rogue yowled with fury as he spun around. The tom lunged at Dustpaw. Shadepaw watched with horror as they rolled in the dust, until the rogue ended up pinning Dustpaw down.

Dustpaw struggled helplessly against his foe's greater weight. "G-get off," he hissed, still struggling.

The rogue let out a harsh laugh, then fastened his teeth in Dustpaw's throat.

Shadepaw saw Harepaw and Emberpaw begin to run in, but she was the fastest. With all her might, she leaped up on the tom's back, she dug her claws in his shoulders and pulled back. Taken by surprise, the tom reared back, freeing frightened Dustpaw. "Move!" She growled to Dustpaw as she tried to stay on. When she saw Dustpaw roll away, she sheathed her claws, falling to the ground.

Emberpaw, Harepaw, and Dustpaw launched themselves at the tom again, but the tom had placed a paw on her throat, his claws unsheathed. They dug deeper, making her screech. Blood pooled from the wound. She struggled to stay conscious. She heard a screech and then blacked out.

# Chapter 5

Shadepaw let out a groan as she awoke, her vision slightly blurred. Then she remembered the dreadful fight against the rogue. She looked around, noticing she was in the medicine cat den in a nest aligned with soft feathers.

She began to sit up when she heard Addertail's voice say, "Don't try sitting, lay down."

Shadepaw sighed and plopped back down.

A tail touched her shoulder softly. "Next time, don't jump into a battle you can't win," Addertail whispered softly.

Although the words hurt, Shadepaw knew it was true. She slowly turned to face Addertail, careful not to open the wound at her throat. "It's- it's just I don't want to be bullied anymore, not by my family, not by my clanmates, and not by any rogues." Shadepaw suddenly froze. "What happened to the rogue?" she asked, hoping he wasn't in camp threatening her clanmates.

Addertail hesitated, her claws raking the stone floor, making an awful scraping noise. "He's still in camp," she admitted, although it sounded like she wasn't pleased.

Shadepaw's eyes widened like an owl's. "What?" she rasped, sitting up immediately.

Her mentor lowered her gaze. "Eaglestar said he shouldn't be freed to threaten other cats."

Disbelief clouded in Shadepaw's amber eyes. "What about *his* cats?" she whispered to herself. Her heart felt like it was going to rip in two. *Does he hate me too?* She tried to shake the thought out of her

head, but it kept coming back. "You have to let me start training again," she begged, her eyes pleading.

The medicine cat opened her mouth to protest, but then she quickly shut them. "You won't get out of your nest, I'll bring the leaves to you and you have to tell me what they're used for." Addertail disappeared, but then reappeared with a bundle of different herbs.

Shadepaw shifted, getting a better look at the herbs as Addertail placed them down. Shadepaw quickly spread them out so she could look at them all at the same time. She first looked at a plant with small, daisy-shaped flowers. "Easy," she purred, "feverfew!"

Addertail gave her a glowing look of approval, and pushed a different herb in front of her.

The herb had a long stem ragged leaves. "Parsley!" she mewed confidentially, pushing it away.

The grey-and-white she-cat purred, then said, "Correct!"

After a while, Addertail put the herbs away, saying it was getting late and they'd do the same tomorrow.

Shadepaw watched as Addertail crawled in her nest, placing her fluffy tail over her nose. When she heard her mentor start to gently snore, she lifted herself quietly out of her nest and padded out of the den silently. She looked at the bright moon and let out a sigh. She sat down and curled her tail around her paws. The cool night breeze went blew through her fur, making her shiver at the cold.

A tail suddenly flicked under Shadepaw's chin, making her jump, shocked.

Harsh laughing came from next to her as she felt fur brush against her. "What is a pathetic cat like you doing up at night?" The voice sneered.

Shadepaw jumped to her paws, she turned and face the cat, and with a frightening shock, it was the rogue prisoner. "W-what are you doing here?" she looked in his eyes, seeing amusement.

The rogue flicked an ear, "My lazy *guard*- Shatteredfang I believe - fell asleep." The tom let out a snort. "What a reliable cat!"

Shadepaw's pelt was still fluffed. "Who even are you?" she demanded.

The rogue flicked his tail. "My name's Eclipse," he replied, looking up at the sky.

Shocked at his sudden change, her fur flattened. "Why are you here?" she asked, curiosity replacing her fear.

Eclipse's eyes didn't move from the starlit sky. "I was capture on your land," he replied, though his voice sounded guarded.

Shadepaw tilted her head. "Don't you have a family?" She watched his face carefully.

Eclipse finally lowered his head, his gaze clouding for a heartbeat, but it cleared away, replaced by rage. "Everybody does!" he snarled, lashing his tail.

"I don't," Shadepaw said, lowering her voice. "My mother hates me, and my father neglects me." She felt herself go on. "My littermates, they died! I could have somebody else with the same problem, and we could have worked it out together!" Her voice began to raise to a wail. "Eaglestar obviously hates me, I don't even know why." She went on as her vision blurred. "What clan leader watches their clanmates get torn about by a rogue? Even you would be a better leader than that fox-heart!" She began breathing heavily, trying to stop herself from wailing louder. "My mother wants to kill me!" she yowled as loud as she could.

Silence met her words.

Finally Eclipse looked at her. "That's terrible," he muttered. "I'm sorry, I shouldn't have hurt you." He stood up and padded off to a small den in the clearing.

Shadepaw watched as he left, suddenly feeling disappointed. She could hear the wind as it whistled. She slowly padded back into her nest and drifted off.

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Shadepaw stretched. She just woke up, the memories of the night before flooding through her. She looked over at Addertail's nest and saw that it was empty. Still not fully awake, she padded out of the den. It was a little past dawn. Swiftly glancing at Eclipse's den, she began walking over to Softsong until Robinheart beat her to it.

Robinheart seemed to notice Shadepaw and gave her a hard stare before talking to Softsong, who was listening intently, sometimes nodding.

Shadepaw growled softly and whipped around, storming across camp. She  sat down under her favorite tree and waited for Addertail to come back, occasionally casting glances at Robinheart and Softsong.

The soft sound of paw steps made Shadepaw look up. She saw Flowersting and Duskwhisper.

Her eyes were dull as she looked at them. They were clearly happy. "Hello," she mumbled.

Ignoring her attitude, Flowersting purred, "I'm expecting Duskwhisper's kits!"

Duskwhisper stepped forward, nuzzling his mate. "We can't wait," he said, giving his chest a couple of embarrassed licks.

Shadepaw forced a purr, remembering when she was a kit made it almost impossible. "I'm so proud for both of you, you'll be great parents," she congratulated. *Unlike Robinheart*, she thought bitterly.

Duskwhisper and Flowersting padded away, waving their tails good-bye.

Shadepaw sighed and stood up, and almost at the same time, Addertail walked in camp. Shadepaw sprinted over to Addertail, who was carrying tansy. "Need help?" she asked, wanting to do something.

Addertail spat out the herbs. "You're suppose to be resting!" she

growled, flicking her tail with annoyance.

Shadepaw shrugged. "I feel fine," she mewed simply.

Her mentor let out an exaggerated sigh. "Very well," she said, giving up. "Take these to the den," she ordered.

Shadepaw obeyed, and at once she took the leaves in her jaws and darted off to the medicine den. She placed them down in the tansy pile and headed out of the den. Eclipse was outside, getting cold stares from her clanmates, his eyes were filled with undisguised rage... or was it fake? Shadepaw narrowed her eyes in suspicion. Why was he making a scene?

"If I wasn't here, I wouldn't need your prey!" he snarled, taking a vole from the pile.

She caught his eye and they flashed momentarily with fear. She watched as he quickly padded back to his den. She felt her fur prickle. Shadepaw saw Robinheart and Softsong still talking, now *laughing!* She snorted and sat down outside the medicine cat den. *Someday I will make my mother like me.*

# Chapter 6

Shadepaw sorted the herbs that were on the floor. Lostkit and Frozenkit had stormed into the den, trying to steal herbs to eat, and they ended up leaving empty pawed with the herb storage place a mess. It's been two moons since Robinheart had started talking to Softsong, and all they had done was grow closer.

A rustle came from the entrance. Shadepaw turned to see Addertail with lush catmint.

Addertail set the precious catmint down near Shadepaw. "This could be the only catmint left," she said, worry overwhelming her voice.

Shadepaw breifly touched her tail to Addertail's shoulder. "Leaf-bare just started, if we're lucky, we could find more."

The medicine cat gave an uncertain grunt.

Shadepaw finished sorting the herbs and padded outside. She saw Pebbleclaw, Owlflight, and Rainflash talking, sharing a large rabbit. Not sure at first, she began to walk over to the group. When she got over, she asked, "Can I join?"

Owlflight and Rainflash nodded and made room, but Pebbleclaw was more hesitant. Finally, he gave up and let Shadepaw join.

Rainflash took a bite of the rabbit. "We were talking about the rogue prisoner," she mumbled, her mouthful.

Owlflight nodded. "He seems... well, a bit uneasy today."

Shadepaw bit into the rabbit, delighted at the taste of it's warm blood.

Pebbleclaw was staring at the rogue through narrow eyes. "There's

fear in his eyes," he growled, snorting with disgust. "It's like he thinks we're going to do something to him."

Shadepaw looked at Eclipse. Now that the others mentioned it, he didn't look angry or rude, there was pure fear in his eyes. She swallowed her mouthful of mouth. "Maybe he knows something we don't," she started, tilting her head thoughtfully. "I think he came here to start a fight, I don't think he was really trying to hunt."

Owlflight exchanged a glance with Rainflash. "That could be true," he said, flicking an ear.

Pebbleclaw looked at Shadepaw, a gleam of approval in his eyes. "He has to know something we don't know." He bent down and took a bite of the prey, chewing thoughtfully.

Rainflash stared at Eclipse. "What ever he knows, I don't like it," she mumbled uncomfortably.

Shadepaw looked at the ground, trying to think. "We have to find out what it is, because it seems like it's going to happen soon," she paused, looking at the older cats. "Got any ideas?"

Owlflight shook his head. "No matter what we do to him, I don't think he'll tell us."

Pebbleclaw stood up, looking at the sky. "I got to go on a hunting patrol now," he told the small group. "Sorry."

Shadepaw watched as he bounded away. She looked at the remains of the rabbit, there was still a lot of meat left. She turned to Owlflight and Rainflash. "Want anything else?"

The young warriors shook their heads. "No thanks, maybe the kits are still hungry," Owlflight suggested, looking at the nursery. "Or Flowersting, she'll be kitting any day now."

Shadepaw nodded and grabbed the remains of the rabbit and carried them over to the nursery. When she looked inside, Flowersting was in the den, her stomach large and swollen. Shadepaw suppressed a shiver, she was glad she couldn't have kits. She padded in and dropped the rabbit at Flowersting's paws. "You

can have this," she mewed.

Flowersting looked up at her, her eyes brimming with gratitude. "Thank you, Shadepaw!" She took a small bite of what was left of the rabbit. "Rabbit is my absolute favorite."

Shadepaw left the queen to feast on the remains and walked over to Dustpaw, who just got back from training. "How was it?" She asked, nudging Dustpaw.

Dustpaw's eyes glowed. "Great!" He let out a long purr. "I'm getting better at fighting each day." He reared on his paws and boxed in the air. "Nobody will want to mess with me!"

Shadepaw snorted with amusement. "Yeah." She rolled her eyes. "Who would want to fight a puffball like you?" she teased.

The apprentice's eyes glowed playfully. "I'm not a puffball!" He barreled himself into Shadepaw, who squeaked. He raised a paw. "Do you give up?"

"Yes!" She begged, placing a paw dramatically on her forehead. "Please spare me,"

Dustpaw stared into her eyes. "Do you promise to not cross me again?"

"Oh, please, Dust*star!*" she purred. "I promise!"

Dustpaw go off of her and stared in her eyes.

Shadepaw got lost in his eyes and began to feel her heart pound. *No!* she growled at herself, looking away. When she looked back up, Dustpaw had a hurt expression on his face.

She gave him apologetic look. "I've go to go see if Addertail needs help," she said, beginning to walk away. She waved her tail, saying bye. She couldn't help but to cast a suspicious glance at Eclipse as he sat outside his small den. She reached the medicine cat den and saw Addertail giving Poppyheart, clan deputy, juniper berries.

"Hello, Shadepaw," Addertail greeted, not turning around.

"Stomach ache?" Shadepaw asked, walking forward to see Poppyheart.

Addertail glanced over her shoulder at Shadepaw. "Yeah, good job, you're great with herbs!" she praised.

Poppyheart finished swallowing the herbs. "Thanks Addertail, I'll tell you if it gets worse."

The medicine cat watched the deputy leave, then turned to Shadepaw. "I really hope we have no trouble with the other clans this leaf-bare."

Shadepaw looked at her mentor, confused at first. "The clans have been pretty peaceful," she commented. "I don't think we'll have a problem."

Shadepaw watched as Addertail curled up to sleep. "Goodnight!" she called softly to her mentor.

"Goodnight," Addertail replied drowsily.

Shadepaw felt herself fall into a deep slumber.

White mist fogged Shadepaw's vision, but then it cleared showing MountainClan camp, peaceful with birds chirping and butterflies flying. A screech of terror then broke the singing of the birds as the camp got stained with red blood. Screeches and screams were constantly echoing. Something thick and wet splashed on her paws. She looked down and saw blood begin to rise, threatening to drown her.

Shadepaw gasped and found herself in her soft nest. She tried to sleep again, but the leaves were rustling a lot, making it hard to fall asleep. She finally gave up and walked out of the den. Expecting it to be windy and freezing, she braced herself, but when she padded slowly out, the wind only softly blew. Confused, she looked around the clearing. When she was about to go back into her nest, a heavy weight fell on her and pushed her face to the ground, blocking her yowl of alarm. She struggled to free herself, but the mysterious cat only pressed her to the ground harder.

"Take them by surprise, then I'll deal with this useless bundle of fur," an unfamiliar voice ordered quietly. Almost immediately, the sound of plenty of soft pawsteps. *This is an attack!*

With all her might, she pushed up, taking the she-cat on top of her by surprise. When the she-cat reared, Shadepaw screeched, "We're under attack!"

The rogue she-cat's eyes lit with panic as she slammed her paws back down on Shadepaw's shoulders. A moment later, the she-cat let out a fierce, shrill yowl. The other cats yowled with her, and broke through the dens. Almost at once, screeches erupted from her clanmates.

Claws dug deeper into Shadepaw's black pelt, letting small streaks of red fall to the ground. She twisted around and saw a ginger she-cat with green eyes stare at her. "Ready to die?" The she-cat snarled.

Shadepaw felt hot breath on her throat. Fighting down her panic, she lashed a paw out blindly, only managing to scratch her opponent's front leg. She heard the she-cat growl, and a heartbeat later, teeth fastened in her throat. Shadepaw stopped struggling and relaxed. *Bye Dustpaw. bye Emberpaw and Harepaw.*

"Leave her alone!" A cat snarled.

Shadepaw felt the sharp teeth that almost killed her vanish. She quickly jumped to her paws and saw Eclipse wrestling with the ginger she-cat.

The ginger she-cat finally stood above the reddish tom. "Eclipse?" she gasped, her eyes widening with surprise. "You're suppose to be helping us!" She spat, her surprise clearly forgotten.

Shadepaw wanted to keep watching, but another cat wrestled her to the ground. The cat's eyes shone with fear and uncertainty. He was about Shadepaw's size. Letting out a sigh of relief, she sank her teeth in the young tom's leg. He reared with surprise, and Shadepaw slashed her claws down his exposed belly. He let out a screech and lost his balance, tumbling to the ground. She reared and forced her

paws down on his chest, knocking the breath out of him. She then slashed her claws across his cheek.

Breathing heavily, the young tom stared at her with pleading eyes. She got off of him and watched as he quickly jumped to his paws and dashed out of camp.

Forgetting about Eclipse and the other rogue, she looked around for Addertail. Shadepaw saw her fighting a larger tom. She faced him fiercely, but Shadepaw could see doubt shining in her eyes. Shadepaw watched with horror as the tom slammed his hind paws into Addertail's jaw. Shadepaw darted over, feeling like she was flying. She made an enormous leap and soared through the air. "Don't worry Addertail!" she screeched. Landing on the tom's back, she clawed out patches of fur.

Without warning, the tom rolled over, squashing Shadepaw beneath him. She felt like her lungs were getting flattened by a giant boulder. She fought for breath as she tried to free herself from the heavy tom.

Shadepaw felt the tom get off of her, letting out a yowl full of rage. She watched as Addertail swiped bravely at the tom. Extending her claws to the max, she darted under the rogue's belly, raking her claws as she exited from where his tail was lashing. She grabbed it with her teeth and bit down as hard as she could. The rogue let out a loud yowl as he tried to keep fighting, but he eventually ran off, going to another cat.

Addertail and Shadepaw stared at each other, their eyes glowing. "Let's go find some injured cats," Addertail said quickly, breaking their locked gazes. She sprinted quickly over to the medicine cats' den, Shadepaw following, right on her tail.

Heartbeats later, Addertail came back out of the medicine den with a mouthful of herbs and her paws wrapped with cobwebs. "I'm going to go," she told Shadepaw, her voice muffled by the herbs.

Shadepaw's eyes  widened. "W-what about me?" she asked, shocked.

Addertail didn't meet her apprentice's gaze. She dropped the herbs

at Shadepaw's paws. "It's safer if I bring the injured cats to you," she pointed out. When she saw Shadepaw open her mouth, about to protest, she added, "You know enough about herbs to heal your clanmates." Without another word, Addertail disappeared into the sea of fighting cats.

Shadepaw sat down nervously, hiding in a small bush. She watched as Poppyheart bit into a rogue she-cat's shoulder, making her yowl in pain. Shadepaw suppressed a shiver.

Time went by, but suddenly she felt claws tear at her pelt. Terrified, she sped out of the bush and looked at her opponent. It was the same brown rogue that she fought with Addertail before. She bared her teeth, trying to look tough, but she knew this cat could easily destroy her.

The rogue took a threatening step forward and revealed sharp, yellow teeth. The tom took a massive leap into the air and landed square on Shadepaw's shoulders, causing her to collapse. "Nobody's here to save you now," he hissed. A harsh laugh broke from him as he sliced open her cheek.

Shadepaw let out a cry of pain. She felt her wet, sticky blood begin to slowly drip down her cheek.

The rogue didn't stop there, he then slowly fastened his sharp teeth in the tip of her ear. He quickly shut his jaws and tore the tip of his ear off. She watched through pain as he spat out her ear tip, which was almost completely red. Claws slowly raked down  her flank. "Just hurry up and kill me!" She hissed through her blurred eyes. She felt the blood from her ear begin to get in her eyes.

"Not yet!" The rogue snarled.

A loud yowl interrupted the torturing. Shadepaw turned her head and saw Pebbleclaw's silhouette against the bright moon. He barreled into the rogue, and they rolled in the dust. Shadepaw watched with horror as the rogue aimed for Pebbleclaw's throat. To Shadepaw's relief, the rogue missed and snapped at air.

Shadepaw was about to go and help her father, but he looked over

his shoulder at her and growled, "No, I don't want you getting hurt."

Shadepaw obeyed, the love and care in his eyes made her feel a wave of emotion. A loud yowl interrupted her thoughts. She looked back at the battling cats and saw dark red slash on Pebbleclaw's side that was dripping blood. Pebbleclaw didn't give up, and he crunched down on his opponent's paw, making the rogue hiss through the pain. When the rogue lifted his injured paw, Pebbleclaw gave him a hard shove, knocking him to the floor. Shadepaw watched with disgust as Pebbleclaw leaned down and bit down hard on the rogue's eye, definitely blinding him in that eye.

The rogue screeched with terror and lashed out, only taking out a clump of Pebbleclaw's fur. Pebbleclaw growled and raked his claws down the rogue's exposed belly. The rogue let out a furious roar and kicked his hind legs, tossing Pebbleclaw in the air.

Shadepaw gasped with pure terror as her father landed with a *thump. Get up!* She willed him silently.

The rogue stood up and bounced forward, landing next to Pebbleclaw. Frozen by horror, Shadepaw couldn't help her father. She watched as the tom with the bleeding eye dug his claws into Pebbleclaw's hind leg and then dragged them down, opening a deep wound. Pebbleclaw tried to get up, but the rogue had put a paw to his throat. Though Pebbleclaw's eyes burned with determination, a strong scent of fear rolled off him.

Suddenly a yowl broke through the screeches of plenty of battling cats. "Retreat!" Shadepaw looked in the location the voice came from and saw the ginger she-cat from the beginning of the battle.

Shadepaw let out a sigh of relief, but when she looked back over to the rogue and Pebbleclaw, the rogue slashed at Pebbleclaw's throat. A horrible gurgling noise arose from her father's throat.

She met the rogue's hate-filled eye. "I think your father fell asleep," he snarled, bounding off.

Shadepaw raced over to Pebbleclaw's blood-stained body. Her eyes blurred as she raised her head to the star-speckled sky to let out a

soundless wail. She curled up next to him, his body was cold, and the scent of death and blood filled her nose. Blood still pooled out of the his wounds, mostly the gash in his throat, covering Shadepaw's black pelt. A small trail of blood trickled out of his mouth. *Why StarClan, why?*

The bushes rustled as Addertail burst through. "There you-" She stopped, her mouth gaping. She slowly padded over to Shadepaw and gave her a comforting lick.

Shadepaw's physical wound felt like nothing compared to the pain in her heart. "H-he saved my life," she rasped. *Why can't I look after myself?*

Addertail's gaze landed on Shadepaw's torn ear. "You'll need herbs for your ear," she announced. "I'll be right back."

Shadepaw watched blankly as Addertail disappeared behind the bushes. "Don't even bother getting herbs for me," she muttered. The grief was almost unbearable, this cat had died saving her life, while she only watched from afar.

Addertail appeared once more, herbs filling her mouth. She dropped a bundle near Shadepaw, and kept the other one near her. "Eat those," she ordered Shadepaw.

Shadepaw sniffed at the leave, realizing it was thyme, she also saw two poppy seeds wrapped in the leaf bundle. She lapped up the leaves, not caring about the bitter taste. She felt Addertail's fluffy tail begin to lead her away from her father's body. Addertail led her to her nest in the medicine cat den.

Shadepaw plopped down, feeling her eyelids begin to fall. Pebbleclaw's blood was still stained on her pelt. The last thought before she fell asleep was, *I need to learn how to look after myself.*

# Chapter 7

Shadepaw felt herself wake up. She stretched and stood up, remembering Pebbleclaw's death, a fresh wave of grief nearly knocked her over. She walked out of the den and saw Pebbleclaw and Icepetal's bodies laying in the clearing. Dried blood spiked Shadepaw's fur as she padded over to the two dead cats, until the familiar summon was called.

"All cats old enough to fight their own battles, gather here beneath the highledge!" Shadepaw padded over where she usually sits for meetings and sat down. She watched as Dustpaw and his littermates padded over to her. She felt Dustpaw press up against her.

Eaglestar stared at the cats below. "As you should know, rogues attacked us the other night."

Cats in the clearing let out angry yowls.

"Two brave warriors of ours died, Pebbleclaw and Icepetal."

Sad murmurs past within the cats gathered

Eaglestar's eyes rested on Eclipse. "We still have one rogue left!" He roared, outraged.

"Drive him out!" Hazelflash, the elder, demanded.

"Kill him!" Softsong shouted.

"Feed his body to the rats!" Robinheart snarled.

The leader raised his tail to silence the cats. "I also lost a life during this rogue attack, I'm still getting back my strength, so I might need somebody else to kill him..."

Cats began to explode into cheers.

Shadepaw felt breath stir in her ear. "If he lost a life in the battle, that means he's on his last life!" Dustpaw hissed silently to her.

Shadepaw flicked her destroyed ear, telling him that she heard him. She looked over at Eclipse, who met her gaze almost at once, his gaze was pleading. She stood up and cleared her throat. "I don't think Eclipse should be punished," she shared, raising her voice against the clamor.

Eaglestar's gaze snapped over to her, glowing with interest. "Eclipse?"

Shadepaw's eyes hardened. "Yes, Eclipse," she growled. She continued, "When I was getting attacked by the rogues' leader, he saved me, risking his life."

Robinheart suddenly stood up. "Are you sure it wasn't Pebbleclaw?" she asked, a sneer in her voice.

Shadepaw pushed down the wave of grief that almost overwhelmed her. "No, it was Eclipse," she snarled, locking eyes with her mother. Robinheart just snarled and turned away. "I'd like to request him as a warrior of MountainClan."

Shocked gasped erupted from the cats gathered in the clearing. Shadepaw felt Dustpaw stiffen besides her.

Robinheart still looked furious. "You probably betrayed the clan! How do you know that mangy rogue's name?" Her tail lashed side-to-side.

"It came up in conversa-" She was cut of by her mother.

"What if *you* killed Pebbleclaw?" Robinheart accused, her eyes blazing with a strong flame.

Addertail stepped forward. "Shadepaw would never kill a clanmate!" she hissed, her pelt fluffing.

Shadepaw was only half aware of her mentor standing up for her.

Shock pulsed through her body. *Do my clanmates believe that outrageous out burst?*

Silver fur flashed at the corner of Shadepaw's eye as Thistlejaw stood up. His eyes were calm as he gazed at Robinheart, who was clearly angry. "Robinheart, she's your daughter for StarClan's sake," he pointed out. "And why would she kill her father?" he questioned, his tail tip twitching. "Anyway, you should know that Shadepaw's claw marks would be much smaller than that."

The calico she-cat looked around the cats in the clearing for support as the cats murmured in agreement with Thistlejaw.

Shadepaw looked back at Eaglestar who stood on the highledge. "Will you make Eclipse a warrior or not?" she rasped, feeling her shock begin to vanish.

Eaglestar met her amber gaze steadily. "I will, but if he causes any harm to this clan, you and him are both gone, okay?"

Dustpaw leaned close to her ear as he whispered, "Don't do it, you can't trust rogues."

Shadepaw flicked an ear, but said confidently, "Okay, I agree with that." *Was that the right thing to do?* She asked herself, doubt rising in her. *Yes, it was!* Shadepaw answered herself fiercely.

Eaglestar just blinked at her, disbelief shining in his eyes.

Did he think I'd refuse?

Eaglestar shook his head then raised it to the sky. "Eclipse, please step forward," he ordered after a moments hesitation.

The rogue obeyed padded closer to the highledge.

"StarClan, I asked of you to share all your knowledge and wisdom to this... cat" His intense yellow gaze stared into Eclipse's amber. "Eclipse, do you promise to uphold the warrior code, even at the cost of your life?"

"I-I do," he answered his voice shaking.

Eaglestar's eyes glowed with uncertainty for a heartbeat, but it cleared. "Then by the powers of StarClan, I grant you your warrior name." The brown leader paused, then continued, "For this day and moons on, you will be known as Eclipseheart."

Shadepaw was the first to call his name. "Eclipseheart. Eclipseheart. Eclipseheart."

Slowly, a couple other cats began calling his name, their voices uncertain.

Shadepaw heard Dustpaw, Harepaw, and Emberpaw reluctantly join in, raising their heads.

When the "cheering" died down, Eaglestar yowled, "This meeting has been dismissed!"

Shadepaw jumped to her paws. "Wait!" she meowed loudly as the cats began to depart.

Eaglestar turned, still on the highledge. His eyes narrowed. "What *now?*" He growled.

Shadepaw felt all cats turn to her. *Am I doing the right thing?* "I want to train as a warrior!" she blurted.

She heard Harepaw take in a sharp breath, but other than that, it was silent.

What seemed like moons, Robinheart finally broke out with a harsh laughter. "Stop trying to attract attention to yourself!" The calico she-cat's eyes narrowed. "You should just admit to yourself that you'll always be the cat with no real friends."

Shadepaw shrank down, her heart breaking. "I-I thought you wanted me to become a warrior."

Robinheart rolled her eyes. "A pathetic excuse of a cat like you can't become a warrior," she growled softly

She tried to meet her mother's stare bravely, but she couldn't even glance at them, afraid of what she'd find in their depths.

Softsong stood up, his ginger fur brushed. "A true warrior should be able to stand up for them self," he declared.

Shadepaw saw Robinheart giving him an admiring glance and cringed. Robinheart would usually shred people for standing up for her.

A new voice joined the quarrel. "I'll mentor Shadepaw," it said.

Shadepaw glanced over her shoulder where the voice came from. There was the quiet, shy she-cat Clovergaze. Shadepaw remembered the time she was a kit, Clovergaze had tried to comfort her when she found out when her mother hated her. She winced at the memory.

She watched as Eaglestar rested his yellow eyes on Clovergaze, then to her. "Addertail, are you OK with this?" the leader asked, raising an eyebrow.

Shadepaw dared to look at her old mentor. Her eyes were clouded with sadness.  "I will allow Shadepaw to do whatever she wants," she said, her mew thick.

Eaglestar looked back at Shadepaw. "Are you sure you want to train as a warrior?"

Shadepaw met his gaze, trying to look confident. "I'm positive," she managed to choke out. One question stuck in her head, and when she tried to get it out, it came back. *Who am I?*

Eaglestar looked at the cats gathered in the clearing. "Shadepaw, please step forward," he ordered.

Shadepaw padded forward, trying to avoid the gazes of her clanmates.

"Clovergaze, you are a clever, brave warrior, I trust you to pass on all you know to Shadepaw." The leader said impatiently. "This meeting is dismissed."

Shadepaw watched as the clan broke up, walking over to the two limp bodies at the edge of camp. Shadepaw followed them, wanting

to wish Pebbleclaw a happy life in StarClan. Lavender and mint scent was strong as she neared the dead cats. She sighed, her heart heavy. She quickly laid down, her still blood-stained pelt pressing against his. "I promise I will protect my clanmates at the cost of my life, like you did to me," she whispered. "Some day, I will be just as brave and strong as you, I hope you watch over me in StarClan, seeing how you inspired me to become the best warrior the clans have ever seen."

# Chapter 8

"Flowersting's kitting!" A loud voiced yowled, waking Shadepaw. Her first instinct was to jump up and help, but then she realized she wasn't a medicine cat apprentice anymore. Shadepaw saw the outlines of Dustpaw, Emberpaw, and Harepaw stretching.

Shadepaw sighed and heaved herself out of her nest. She quickly slipped out of the den. The cats in the clearing were in a crowd around the nursery. Addertail was rushing back in forth from the medicine den and nursery.

Shadepaw just sulked in the shadows, trying not to be seen. The sound of pawsteps made her look up to see Dustpaw. Shadepaw met his gaze and then look back at the ground. She felt his pelt brush against her's as he sat down next to her.

"You don't have to hide," Dustpaw said quietly, breaking the silence.

Shadepaw sighed. "I just feel like a stranger," she admitted. "I-I don't even know who I am anymore," she wailed quietly, trying not to draw attention.

Dustpaw's nose touched her ear briefly, but then he drew it away. "You're Shadepaw, and you'll always be." He paused, then added, with humor in his eyes, "Well, until you get your warrior name."

Shadepaw didn't reply, she was too busy watching Robinheart and Softsong.

The tabby apprentice's eyes went serious again as he looked at her. "What is it?" he asked, trying to follow her gaze.

"Softsong and Robinheart are getting too close," she growled, unsheathing her claws and digging into the soft soil under her paws.

Dustpaw nudged her. "Let's go outside of camp, into the forest area," he told her, changing the subject, trying to lighten the mood.

Lifting herself up, she began to follow him out of camp. When they got out of the main part of camp, Dustpaw turned to her and asked, "Want to race to the river?"

The challenge in his eyes made Shadepaw agree immediately. "Of course, but be prepared to lose!" Shadepaw had already dashed off, mid-sentence.

She heard Dustpaw complain behind her. She just let out a purr of amusement. The cold air streamed through her fur as her paws thumped against the ground. The hard rock beneath her paws turned to soft grass as they neared the river. She caught sight of the sparkling blue river. She came to a stop at the edge of the rushing water. She heard Dustpaw stop next to her, panting like a dog.

"Great StarClan, you're fast!" He purred.

Suddenly, white speckles began to drift to the floor. Shadepaw watched as one fell on her nose, squealing when it touched. "It's cold!"

Dustpaw looked up in amazement. "This must be snow!" The snow stuck to the ground, creating small white patches on the ground.

Shadepaw shook her head, sending the snow flying onto the ground. "I'm freezing," she complained, pressing against Dustpaw, who purred in response. Shadepaw's eyes darkened. "We have to go back to camp," she hissed to Dustpaw, shaking off the snow on her pelt. "*Now.*"

Dustpaw's eye widened, but Shadepaw dashed off, leaving Dustpaw. Her paws led her back to camp where she saw Lostkit and Frozenkit playing in the clearing. "Robinheart!" she called, her eyes narrow.

Robinheart appeared out of the warrior cats' den. "Wha-"

Robinheart stopped when she saw her daughter. She stomped over to her, letting out a irritated growl. "If it's a fight you want, come at me."

Shadepaw fought the urge to shy away from her mother's scorching gaze.  "Why Softsong?" she managed to choke. "Please don't do this to me."

Robinheart's eyes burned with a ferocious fire. "Let me love who I want," she snapped. The words hung in the air until Robinheart spoke again. "After all, you are my daughter, so you need to respect my decisions," she sneered, lashing her tail. Lowering her head to Shadepaw's ear, she whispered, "Softsong can actually save cats without dying." Shadepaw watched, heart tearing as Robinheart padded over to Softsong, tail high.

"All cats old enough to fight their own battles, gather here beneath the highledge!" The familiar summon echoed around the clearing. Shadepaw turned and saw Eaglestar on the highledge. The rest of the cats, anxious about Flowersting's kitting, began to slowly settle into their spots. "As you all know, Flowersting is kitting, but today, two of our kits will be joining the apprentices' den." Eaglestar's yellow gaze rested warmly on the kits. "Frozenkit, Lostkit, please step forward."

The young cats bounced up near to their leader as he jumped down.

"Thistlejaw, you are a brave, loyal warrior, I want you to pass on your talent to Frozenpaw," he announced. "Poppyheart, you are a very experienced she-cat, and I trust you to pass on your leadership skills to Lostpaw."

Shadepaw looked at Frozenpaw and saw her expression change to disbelief and resentment. The rest of the cats seemed unaware of Frozenpaw being upset as they cheered, "Lostpaw!

"Frozenpaw!

"Lostpaw!"

"Frozenpaw!"

Addertail's voice broke through the chanting. "Flowersting has one handsome tom!" she announced, her tail held proudly up.

"Does he have a name?" Dappleshine asked, tilting his head.

Addertail shook her head. "She said she'd pick a name tomorrow."

Eaglestar's tail tip twitched. "You interrupted our meeting," he said, a low growl rumbling in his throat.

Addertail flattened her ears defensively. "One of your cats just had a handsome kit, do you care?" she hissed.

Eaglestar narrowed his eyes. "You should have waited until after the meeting." He raised his voice, which was pointless because the clan was listening, as he added, "This meeting is now dismissed."

Shadepaw turned around to find Clovergaze. "We're going to work on your hunting, since you started your training late, you'll have to work harder then you ever have." Clovergaze beckoned Shadepaw with her tail as she padded out of camp. Shadepaw followed her, her mind drifting off to her recent argument with her mother. There was something in her mother's eyes that made Shadepaw shiver. A wall of fur snapped her back into the present. "Pay attention," Clovergaze meowed sternly.

Shadepaw lowered her head. "Sorry," she mumbled.

Clovergaze's eyes softened to sympathy. "I just want you to pay attention so you can become a warrior at the same time as Harepaw, Emberpaw, and Dustpaw." Her tail rested briefly on Shadepaw's shoulder. "Now, get in your best hunting crouch."

Shadepaw obeyed, making sure her tail wasn't up too high or dragging on the floor.

Clovergaze nodded approvingly. "Good," she praised. "Try stalking forward now."

Shadepaw found it difficult as she placed one paw in front of the other, careful not to disturb the leaves, but then she got used to it.

"You're a natural hunter, that's for sure." Clovergaze inspected her position once again, but found no major flaws. "You can get out of it now."

Shadepaw stood up again, stretching. "Can I try catching something?" she asked, her eyes gleaming hopefully.

Clovergaze's mouth gaped as if she were going to say something, but she just nodded. "I'll correct you if you mess up with stalking." She paused, opening her mouth as if trying to detect any prey scents. "Can you scent any prey?" she asked.

Shadepaw opened her mouth and scented the air. Besides the scent of frost, she could detect the slightest trace of squirrel. She crouched down and stealthily stalked forward, her ears pricked, trying to determine where the squirrel was. A grey flash caught her eye. *Squirrel!* She thought excitedly, her pelt brushing. Her fur rustled the bush she was near, and the squirrel's ears twitched as it dashed off. Without a moment of hesitation, she bolted after it, she nearly caught it when it scurried up a tree. With a tremendous leap, she caught her fore paws on a low branch. She hauled herself up, still keeping the squirrel in her sight. Snow speckled her black pelt as she reached the next branch.

"Shadepaw, get down!" She heard Clovergaze hiss from below her.

Shadepaw ignored her, silently climbing to the next branch- the branch with the plump squirrel.

Taking a deep breath, she began to slowly creep forward. *Crack.* The squirrel flew to the next tree. Scared of falling, she leaped after it, her mind taken over by her fear. She watched as the branch fell on the floor with a shiver. Something soft was beneath her as she unsheathed her claws. She looked at her paws and saw the limp body of a squirrel. *I caught it!*

Shadepaw picked it up with strong jaws, and carefully made her way down the tree. She dropped it at her mentor's paws, who just shook her head. "I have one crazy, yet determined, apprentice," she chuckled. "I think that's good for the day, you must be exhausted after that intense squirrel chase!"

Shadepaw felt pride warm her heart as she picked up her first catch. It was quite plump for leaf-bare prey, which made Shadepaw feel even better. The sun was slowly had already disappeared behind the mountain when they got back. Shadepaw put her squirrel on the small heap of prey and picked a scrawny mouse for herself. She saw Eclipseheart pad over to her as she took a bite. His eyes were troubled. She swallowed her mouthful as Eclipseheart stopped by her side. He slowly lay down. "What's wrong?" she asked, taking another mouthful of mouse after.

"Cats are planning on murdering Eaglestar," he whispered, getting closer to her good ear.

Shadepaw nearly choked. "What?" She gasped, eyes wide. She lowered her voice as she continued, "who?"

"Most warriors, every cat in the den knows about it, but some don't want to get involved," he answered, his voice panicked.

"When will this be taking place?"

Eclipseheart hesitated, but he eventually replied, "tonight." His eyes narrowed as he added, "he isn't a great leader."

Shadepaw nodded, Poppyheart would be a much better leader. "I'll help," she mewed briskly.

# Chapter 9

The moon was high in the sky as Frozenpaw prodded her awake. "It's time," she whispered. Frozenpaw had heard about the assassination plan and almost immediately agreed to help. The two apprentices silently slipped out of the den where snow stuck to the ground. Dustpaw, Harepaw, Emberpaw, and Lostpaw were still sleeping silently. A group of cats stood outside the leader's den. As they got closer, she could identify the cats: Rainflash, Owlflight, Dappleshine, Shatteredfang, Thistlejaw, Clovergaze, Froststrike, and Silverflower.

"The apprentice's are here," Shatteredfang whispered.

Thistlejaw's eyes raked across the cats and fell on Frozenpaw and Shadepaw. "You two, Frozenpaw, Shadepaw, will deal the death blow when I say." His gaze switched to Shatteredfang. "You're the strongest and heaviest, so you will shove his face in the dirt, making his yowls of pain muffled, almost silent." His gaze then went to Rainflash and Owlflight. "You two will rake his left side, you have sharp claws." He turned to Froststrike and Dappleshine. "You two will get the right side, make sure he feels great pain." His gaze finally rested on Silverflower. "We will blind him and claw his ears off." He paused, letting the cats get to know their jobs in their heads. "Everybody ready?"

The cats gathered let out hushed, yet excited murmurs.

"Let's go!" They slowly crept into the den, careful not to disturb the sleeping leader. He flicked his tail at Shatteredfang who jumped onto his leader and shoved his face into the dirt, muffling his yowl of alarm. The rest of the cats got in their position, raking and biting

the leader who tried to fling them off, but failed miserably. Frozenpaw and Shadepaw waited patiently for their turn. Frozenpaw's eyes were shining with excitement. Blood glistened on the leader's once brown pelt. His ears were both shredded like Shadepaw's one ear. Claw marks covered his eyes, meaning he was obviously blind. "Make room for Shadepaw and Frozenpaw!"

Shadepaw and Frozenpaw padded over to the blood-stained leader. "I'll get his stomach, you get his throat," Frozenpaw growled.

Shadepaw obeyed and softly fastened her teeth into Eaglestar's throat. Frozenpaw's eyes gleamed in the dark den as she whispered, "one, two three..." On three, Shadepaw bit down as hard as she could while Frozenpaw slashed open his belly, leaving a long gash. Blood pooled quickly out of the now limp body.

"He's dead," Dappleshine rasped.

The sour tang of blood filled the air, making Shadepaw feel sick. *Why did I do that?* She wailed in her mind. *What did that accomplish?*

As the silence stretched, Thistlejaw stepped forward. "Let's go to the river to wash our paws then return to camp," he ordered, somber.

"Quick, quick!" A voice woke Shadepaw from her dream. "Eaglestar has been murdered!"

Shadepaw opened one eye to a slit and saw Dustpaw, his face panicked. She groaned and turned her back to him.

Dustpaw just took her scruff and dragged her out of the den as she hissed insults. In the middle of the clearing lay Eaglestar's teared up body. Shadepaw forced her eyes to go wide with shock.

Poppyheart jumped onto the highledge, her head high. "Eaglestar's murder is a shock to us all, but right now we need a leader," she said, her voice solemn. "After this meeting I will head to the Shimmering Pond to receive my nine lives and name."

"What about deputy?" Goldenspiral asked, her eyes clouded with worry.

Poppyheart's eyes locked with Goldenspiral's. "Deputy will be chosen when I return," she answered. Her gaze drifted across the clearing. "Any questions before Addertail and I are off?"

Softsong stood up, his orange pelt dotted with snow. "What about the murderer?"

Poppyheart flicked her tail with acknowledgement. "If the murderer or murderers are discovered, they will be severely punished." She paused, looking at the cats. "Anything else?"

The cats in the crowd shook their heads.

"This meeting is now dismissed!" Shadepaw watched as Poppyheart leaped gracefully on the snow-covered ground.

Shadepaw headed to the nursery, wanting to see the newborn kit. "Can I come in?" she asked softly.

Shuffling came from the den, but quickly stopped. "Yes," Flowersting's gentle voice replied.

Shadepaw nosed her way in, and saw a small, dark grey kit sleeping soundly next to Flowersting. She looked closer and saw that it had a white underbelly. "He's amazing," she breathed, trying to avoid her kit memories. "Does he have a name?"

Flowersting's eyes rested on the little bundle of fur, then turned to Shadepaw. "His name is Snakekit."

Shadepaw's eyes softened. "That's a beautiful name for such a handsome kit!" she purred.

Flowersting's green eyes burned into Shadepaw's amber as she mewed, "You would make a great mother, Shadepaw."

Shadepaw lowered her gaze, the image of Dustpaw popping into her head. "Maybe..." she whispered to herself. Raising her voice, she said, "I got to train now, Clovergaze is teaching me battle moves!" She waved her tail good-bye to Flowersting and padded out of the den. Clovergaze was outside of the den, waiting for Shadepaw.

Clovertail began walking towards the entrance, Shadepaw followed. "Lostpaw and Frozenpaw are training with us, we're learning basic skills."

When they got to the grassy training clearing, Frozenpaw and Lostpaw were already there with Thistlejaw and Goldenspiral, who was taking over for Poppyheart.

Goldenspiral stepped forward. "I want to see what you know." She moved her gaze to Lostpaw. Lostpaw darted forward, quick, but not fast enough. Lostpaw landed in the empty space where Goldenspiral had been. She nodded approvingly. "Good for your first time, but remember, your enemy can easily dodge you."

"I'll remember that!" Lostpaw squeaked, going to the side of the clearing again.

Goldenspiral turned her eyes to Frozenpaw. "Your turn," she ordered the apprentice, bracing herself for the attack. Frozenpaw narrowed her eyes, looking at her opponents paws. Quick as a snake, the young apprentice leaped, aiming for Goldenspiral's paws. Goldenspiral was ready for the attack, easily moving her paws out of Frozenpaw's reach. "Smart move," Goldenspiral praised. "Next time don't let your eyes give away where you're going to strike."

Frozenpaw nodded and sat at the edge of the clearing.

"Shadepaw, you're up." Goldenspiral crouched at one side of the clearing while Shadepaw settled on the other. Memories of the rogue attack flooded through her mind. She heard her father's screech as the mangy rogue ripped his throat. Shadepaw crouched, her teeth bared in a snarl. Menace glowed in her eyes as she imagined the murderous rogue. With a roar, she leaped, but only landed on empty ground when Goldenspiral slipped out of the way. Shadepaw spun around, seeing Goldenspiral. She kept her eyes on her throat as she leaped, but as the golden-and-white she cat reared, she dove under the she-cats legs, unbalancing her. When Goldenspiral tumbled to the ground, Shadepaw put an unsheathed paw to her throat, her eyes still fierce.

"Shadepaw," the strong voice of Clovergaze snapped.

Shadepaw unsheathed her paw and got off of the warrior, confused.

Goldenspiral stood up, her pelt ruffled and her eyes full of shock. She cleared her throat. "Good, but just move faster at the beginning," Goldenspiral informed shakily.

Thistlejaw stepped forward. "Frozenpaw, Lostpaw," he called. "Goldenspiral will work with you today." He turned to Shadepaw. "You're a great fighter, so I'm going to teach you more advanced moves." Raising his voice again, he called, "Clovergaze!"

Clovergaze padded over, tail high. "Yes?" she asked.

"Stand over there," he ordered, pointing his tail to where she needed to stand. Clovergaze obeyed. Thistlejaw signaled er with a flick of his tail to run at him. When Clovergaze was almost to Thistlejaw, he fell on his back, and Clovergaze ran into his hind paws. With a lot of strength, he launched her into the air and she landed with a *thump*. When she landed, Thistlejaw easily put a paw to her neck and belly.

Shadepaw stared at the two warriors with astonishment. "That was amazing!" she breathed.

Clovergaze purred. "It takes a lot of strength, that's for sure."

"Can I train with the older apprentice's next time?" she asked hopefully.

Thistlejaw and Clovergaze exchanged a glance, but Clovergaze replied, "Of course, we'll do that tomorrow." Clovergaze looked in the forest for a moment, then returned her gaze to Shadepaw. "Go hunting, there isn't much for you to do now."

Shadepaw nodded and headed out into the snow covered forest.

Shadepaw returned to camp with two small mice. She neatly placed them on the pitiful fresh-kill pile and then padded over to Emberpaw, who was gulping down a shrew. Shadepaw's stomach ached with hunger, but she ignored it. "I'm training with you tomorrow," she told Emberpaw.

"Yep," she mumbled her mouth full, eyes dark.

Shadepaw felt worry crawl through her pelt. "What's wrong?"

Emberpaw's eyes flashed with anger. "You know what's wrong!" she snarled, her claws unsheathing. "You and Frozenpaw are murderers!" She yowled.

The cats in camp began to gather around them.

Shock pulsed through Shadepaw. "Wha-"

"Stay away from Dustpaw, you don't deserve him," she interrupted, hissing.

Pain mixed with her shock. "I'm not a murderer!" Guilt made her pelt fluff as she remembered the sour taste of Eaglestar's blood as she delivered a killing blow.

"I saw you," Emberpaw whispered. Her eyes shone with fear as if the scene was being replayed in her mind. Raising her voice, she growled, "You and Frozenpaw killed Eaglestar!"

# Chapter 10

"The perfect little she-cat, Shadepaw, is a murderer!" Robinheart snarled, eyes glowing with menace.

Shadepaw shrunk down as the cats that didn't take place in the assassination spat insults at her. A claw raked across her good ear. Another blow hit her on the cheek. Blood dripped down her face, falling to the white snow.

"Stop!" A loud voice yowled.

The cats torturing her stepped back as Dustpaw made his way in front.

"Is it true? Did you kill him?" He asked, his eyes clouded.

Shadepaw met his gaze, trembling. "I'm sorry!" she blurted, her eyes blurring. "Forgive me, I shouldn't have done it!"

Dustpaw's eyes shone with disbelief. "How could you!" he hissed. "I thought you were better than that." He lowered his gaze. "Now I know why your mother hates you," he whispered.

The pain was overwhelming. Shadepaw swayed on her paws, a pit of darkness seemed to swallow her, all she could hear was the faint rustling of the trees.

"It wasn't just her," a strong voice spoke up. Shadepaw turned around and saw Clovergaze next to Frozenpaw. "I helped."

Frozenpaw raised her head and yowled. "I helped!"

Thistlejaw stepped forward and dipped his head. "I took part as

well."

Rainflash and Owlflight admitted in sync, "I did too!"

Slowly, all cats that took part admitted their crime, and just as they finished, Poppyheart and Addertail walked into the camp. Poppyheart wordlessly jumped up onto the highledge. "I, Poppystar, leader of MountainClan promise to lead this clan until my death is called."

"Poppystar!"

"Poppystar!"

"Poppystar!" The cats cheered half-heartedly.

"I have thought long and hard about this decision," Poppystar rasped. "This deputy is loyal, brave, protective of his clan, and fearless." She hesitated before announcing, "I hope StarClan hears and approves of my choice. Thistlejaw, I have never doubted your loyalty to MountainClan once, and I hope you are willing to act as MountainClain's deputy!"

Cats in the clearing let out yowls of protest.

Thistlejaw spoke above the clamor. "Poppystar, I have to refuse," he sighed. "I helped kill Eaglestar."

Poppystar didn't look angry, she just dipped her head. "I know," she mewed, her voice hardly more then a breath. "When I was at the Shimmering Pond, Eaglestar told me who murdered him, but he forgives you and understands why you did it." The new leader's eyes hardened. "Now, do you accept or decline my offer, Thistlejaw?"

"If Eaglestar forgives me and the rest of us, I accept," he announced.

Shadepaw felt her pelt burn as if something were looking at her. She turned around and saw Dustpaw, who quickly avoided her gaze.

"Good," she purred. "This meeting is now dismissed!"

Shadepaw turned and walked towards Dustpaw, who quickly padded away.

"How's it feel now," a growl sounded in her ear. Robinheart's scent filled her nose.

Shadepaw turned on her. "Leave me alone!" she hissed, dashing off towards the apprentice's den. Emberpaw, Harepaw, Dustpaw, and Lostpaw's nest were all bunched together, away from Shadepaw's and Frozenpaw's. Shadepaw sighed and fell into an uncomfortable sleep.

Two days had passed since the fight between her and almost every cat in the clan. Cats glared at her, nipped at her, and threw insults at her, making her feel like an outcast. The samething happened with Frozenpaw. Although Thistlejaw was deputy, he sometimes didn't get respected because of the murder. Clovergaze told Shadepaw that she had the day off, because they were working their tails off the past few days. Shadepaw caught Dustpaw padding restlessly around camp. She slowly trotted up to him. "Dustpaw..." She started.

"What?" He snapped, his gaze full of anger and sadness.

"Please forgive me," she whispered, her eyes pleading.

Dustpaw's ear flicked. "Why should I?" he snarled, still pacing.

"I love you," she blurted.

Dustpaw stopped pacing for a moment, then continued. "I loved you too," he sighed, lost in memories.

"I deeply regret what I did," she admitted, lowering her gaze. "You and your littermates were my only friends.

Dustpaw seemed to snap back into reality. "What if one day you get mad at me and decide to kill me?"

Shadepaw lowered her gaze. "It's fine if you don't forgive me, I'll just leave," she sighed, emptiness hollowing her heart. She turned away, her tail dragging at the floor.

"Shadepaw!" A voice called after her. She turned around to see Dustpaw charging after her, snow flying behind him.

She narrowed her eyes. "What?" she hissed, crouching, her tail swaying side-to-side.

Dustpaw's eyes widened as he reared back in surprise. "I-I wanted to know if you wanted to train with me," he stammered.

The bitterness in her eyes vanished. "Oh... I'm so sorry!" she breathed. She stood fully up. "T-that would be great!"

Dustpaw bristled playfully and headed for the entrance. "Last cat to the training clearing is a kittypet!"

Shadepaw leaped after him. "I'm not a kittypet!" She felt herself gaining on him and forced herself an extra burst of speed, but the he was already in the training clearing. She slowed down as she got there just behind him. She plopped down on the ground. "Fine," she laughed, "I'm the kittypet."

Dustpaw purred and shook out his pelt. "Attack me," he ordered, his playfulness suddenly vanishing to seriousness. He crouched down, his teeth bared and eyes dark. Shadepaw crouched at the other side, hissing and spitting. Darting at Dustpaw fast, she crouched, and as he braced himself for her to go under him, she leaped, landing on the other side of him, batting him lightly with sheathed paws. Dustpaw had turned around and met her blows with his own, but he ducked, avoiding one of her blows and threw her off. Shadepaw lost her balance and toppled to the floor, where Dustpaw took her scruff in light jaws. Shadepaw let herself go limp, and when Dustpaw softened his grip even more, she jumped up, hitting him on the chin. Quickly as she could, she raked a sheath paw across his flank.

"Great job!" he purred, shaking out his pelt. "I think you'll be able to become a warrior at the same time as me."

Shadepaw flicked her good ear, but said nothing.

Dustpaw tipped his head thoughtfully for a moment. "Can you use

the first move you used on me?" he asked, getting ready on one side of the clearing.

Shadepaw nodded and then settled herself on the other side. At full speed, she ran at Dustpaw and crouched, but just before she could slide under him, she jumped up, but Dustpaw reared and batted at her with sheathed paws, making her move unsuccessful. She shook out her pelt as she thumped to the ground. "Great idea!" she exclaimed, still getting her breath back.

Dustpaw gave his chest fur a couple of embarrassed licks. "Oh, anybody could have thought of that," he mewed modestly.

"Clovergaze taught me how to roll out of the way of a slashing opponent, I could have used it," she recalled, remembering the other day.

Dustpaw's eyes shone. "Looks like we have to practice a little more."

Dustpaw and Shadepaw returned to camp together, and they earned a disapproving glare from Emberpaw, while Harepaw tried to calm her down. The sun was already behind the mountain, and stars were beginning to emerge.

Clovergaze padded up to the two apprentices. "Shadepaw, we're going on a hunting patrol tomorrow, so make sure your skills are sharp." Without another word, Shadepaw's mentor walked away.

Dustpaw let out a long sigh. "I wonder what the other clans are doing, we don't interact much."

Shadepaw nodded her agreement. "We should meet up every once in a while to talk about what has happened within our clan."

"Well, I'll be in the den if you need me, I'm exhausted," he finished with a yawn.

Shadepaw flicked her tail good-bye and sat down, watching the bright moon rise, illuminating the trees. *I will become the best warrior the clan has ever seen,* she vowed to herself. *Just you watch Robinheart.*

# Chapter 11

Shadepaw bounced excitedly next to Clovergaze. "I can't believe it!" she squeaked. "I'm on dawn patrol!"

Ahead of them were Tinypuddle, Dappleshine, and Rainflash. "We're going to CreekClan's border," Dappleshine announced, padding closer to the creek. Shadepaw had only been near the creek twice, once to get herbs, and once when first exploring territory. They stopped, and Shadepaw had to dig her claws into the ground to stop her from bumping into her mentor.

"Rainpaw!" A cheerful voice called. Shadepaw saw a light grey she-cat run to the border to meet Rainflash.

Rainflash pretended to look puzzled. "Who's Rainpaw?" she asked, looking around. "I'm Rain*flash*!"

The CreekClan cat let out a long purr. "You got your warrior name? I did too! I'm Littlecry."

"Littlecry!" a deep voice called as new cats joined. "I told you not to run ahead!" The brown tabby stopped when he saw the MountainClan cats, then let out a purr. "Long time no see!"

Shadepaw watched as the cats reunite with their old friends while she sat there.

"Is that your apprentice, Clovergaze?" The brown tabby asked, his yellow eyes fixed on Shadepaw.

Clovergaze beckoned Shadepaw over with her tail. "Yes, this is Shadepaw," she introduced.

Shadepaw looked into his friendly yellow eyes and relaxed. "I'm

Briarberry," he announced. "Nice to meet you!" Shadepaw dipped her head in response.

"I wish we could talk to other clan cats more often, we only see each other on border patrols!" Clovergaze complained, her tail twitching. "Anyway," she mewed, "how's Halfstar?"

"Halfstar's great, but she still only has one good ear." Briarberry's eyes met Shadepaw's torn ear. "Where'd you get that?" He asked, his eyes giving away his curiosity.

Shadepaw blinked, trying to think of what to say. She pushed down the fresh wave of grief as she remembered the blood gurgling in Pebbleclaw's throat as his life slipped away from him. She shivered. "It was a rogue," she said quickly, her eyes flicking to Clovergaze and back to the tom.

Briarberry's mouth opened as if he was going to say more, but he closed it. "How's Eaglestar?" he asked, changing the subject.

Clovergaze lowered her gaze. "He's with StarClan now," she murmured. She flashed Shadepaw a warning glance. Shadepaw purposely pretended not to hear and looked around to see Dappleshine talking to a cream colored tom with green eyes, and Tinypuddle talking to a tortoiseshell she-cat with a sharp, long muzzle with small scars marking it.

"We should get back to camp," Dappleshine meowed loudly to the MountainClan cats. They marked the borders and headed back to camp.

Shadepaw stretched in a sunny spot in the clearing, trying to absorb the heat in her dark pelt. The snow under her was freezing, and didn't help her get warm. She saw the apprentice's den entrance rustle as Dustpaw and Harepaw padded out, slowly followed by Frozenpaw, Lostpaw, and Emberpaw. A tail touched Shadepaw's shoulder, making her yelp with surprise. Clovergaze was standing behind her.

"Today you will be renewing Hazelflash's bedding, and freeing his pelt from any ticks you find."

Shadepaw's nose wrinkled with disgust just at the thought, but she reluctantly began gathering moss.

After painstakingly getting rid of ticks and renewing bedding, Shadepaw plopped down into her nest. Her mentor said they'd be hunting the whole day tomorrow, since Shadepaw's fighting skills were sharper than her hunting. The snow had thawed on her pelt, and she fell into a deep sleep.

Mist covered Shadepaw's vision as she was sent to a dream. A familiar stretch of grass greeted her. A warm breeze streamed through her whiskers and softly ruffled her fur. The weather was much more relaxing here than the brisk snow near the mountains.

A frightened rabbit raced past Shadepaw, making her jump in surprise. A few moments later a cream tabby she-cat burst into the clearing, but came to a stop. "Mousedung!" She cursed under her breath. Her fiery green eyes met Shadepaw's amber. "You must be Shadepaw," the she-cat meowed, narrowing her eyes as she inspected her. "I'm Foxtuft," the starry she announced. Foxtuft waited for Shadepaw to reply, and when she didn't she sighed. "Let me show you around StarClan's territory."

Shadepaw followed the StarClan warrior into a sparkling forest. "Wait," Shadepaw mewed, stopping. "How am I in StarClan if I'm just dreaming?"

"StarClan invited you tonight," Foxtuft replied. Foxtuft didn't stop, forcing Shadepaw to continue padding through the forest.

"How'd you die?" Shadepaw watched the occasional StarClan cat pass them.

Foxtuft stopped for a heartbeat, then began padding through the forest again. "I was protecting my leader, Hollystar." Shadepaw had heard many stories about Hollystar, one of the first leaders of MountainClan.  Hollystar was known to be a ferocious fighter, and as an apprentice she led a patrol to attack BoulderClan when they were stealing prey. Many say she had a pelt as dark as a starless sky while others say she had almost black fur with darker stripes.

"What were you protecting her from?" Shadepaw asked curiously.

"Rogues," the cream she-cat replied. "StarClan thinks the rogues split apart when MountainClan, my former clan, destroyed them in the battle I died in, but now they are coming back together to get revenge on the clan that crushed them so long ago."

"What about Eclipseheart?" Shadepaw asked uneasily.

Foxtuft snorted with disgust at the name. "That mange-pelt can drown in a river and let the river wash him onto shore where foxes can toss his body in the air and rip him to shreds."

Speechless, Shadepaw continued following Foxtuft through the forest.

"What type of name is Eclipseheart anyway?" Foxtuft growled.

They walked into a clearing full of cats laying in the sun, eating a mouse or two. All their eyes rested on Shadepaw, but something was off. Each and every cat stared at her with sympathy in their eyes.

"Did you tell the poor scrap yet?" A raspy voice asked. Shadepaw saw a spotted grey tabby looking at her with light green eyes.

Foxtuft shook her head. "No, Quickbreeze, she should find out for herself." Shadepaw felt her heart pound in her chest. *What are they not telling me?*

Quickbreeze shook her head. "Whatever you think, Foxtuft. Don't get mad at me when she's heartbroken." Without another word, Quickbreeze dashed into the woods.

Everything seemed to fade as Shadepaw felt herself being brought back to her nest. "No!" she yowled, reaching a paw out desperately. "What do I need to know?" Darkness engulfed her as she was transported back to her cozy nest in the apprentices' den. Her eyes flicked open. She could make out the sleeping shaped of Lostpaw and Frozenpaw. Shadepaw quietly slid out of the den, careful not to wake the younger apprentices. Snow fell quickly from the sky as Shadepaw raced to Addertail's den. She saw Addertail looking

through the herb store. Shadepaw pushed down memories as she padded next to her former mentor. "Addertail, I had a dream!"

Addertail's ear's pricked as she glanced over her shoulder at Shadepaw. Her eyes were wide with surprise. "Shadepaw!" She purred, rushing over to greet her. Her voice got serious as she asked. "What was it?"

Shadepaw looked at her black paws. "I was in StarClan territory, I saw a cat named Foxtuft, she told me about how she died saving Hollystar..." She trailed off. "Well, she saved Hollystar from rogues, and she believes the rogues that attacked us are descendants from the ones long ago getting revenge."

Addertail nodded, her eyes thoughtful. "That makes sense," she said at last.

"They won't stop until they get their revenge!" Shadepaw hissed, digging her claws into the ground as she remembered the tom that had killed her father. "They aren't the only ones that want revenge," she hissed more quietly. But Addertail obviously heard.

"Now, now, no need to get aggressive," she soothed. "Did Foxtuft say anything else?"

Shadepaw sheathed her claws and let her fur lie flat. "Before I got sent to my nest again, Foxtuft said that I should find something out for myself that will break my hea-" She was interrupted by a loud meow.

"Addertail, I have some important ne-" Robinheart stopped as she saw Shadepaw. A grin plastered on her face. Shadepaw felt cold dread drop down in her like a stone. A chill went up her spine as she looked into her mother's frosty green eyes. "I wanted to let you know that I'm expecting kits, I've told Thistlejaw that I'd like to be excused from patrols."

Shadepaw felt the dread deepen, the world seemed to swirl around her. Shock pulsed through her almost knocking her to the hard floor. She was faintly aware of Addertail and Robinheart's presence. *No... Why must this happen to me, StarClan?* Her heart seemed to tear

apart, pain sharper than a claw could deal.

Shadepaw was vaguely aware of the stare Addertail gave her. "Er... Yeah, make sure to get tons of rest, but you should know what to expect."

Shadepaw just let her tail droop as she padded out of the den, leaving Robinheart and Addertail to stare after her. Thoughts swarmed in her head, begging desperately for an answer. Shadepaw felt numb. It wasn't from the cold, it was from the news she just received. Kits were suppose to be a good omen, but nothing good could come out of Robinheart having another litter. Only more neglecting could come from this, more heart breaking. Softsong's expression was bright as she passed him, but he didn't noticed her mood, she wasn't even sure he saw her.

"Shadepaw!" A voice called behind her.

Shadepaw didn't bother to turn around, but she ran into a sturdy pile of fur.

"Shadepaw," the voice said more softly. Shadepaw looked up and saw the muscular shape of Dustpaw. "What's wrong?"

She met his soft gaze. "Robinheart..." she whispered, loud enough for the tabby apprentice to hear. "Robinheart's expecting Softsong's kits."

# Chapter 12

Wind and snow buffeted against Shadepaw's face. A moon had passed since she found out her mother was expecting kits. Dustpaw, Harepaw, and Emberpaw's final assessment would be the next day, unless the weather was bad. Shadepaw was on a hunting assessment, but she knew it would be almost impossible to catch something in the blizzard. Her paws were covered in the thick layer of snow. Her face stung as she tried to face the wind. *I'll catch a cold, not prey,* she thought grumpily. She lifted her nose and caught the faint scent of vole above the smell of frost. *I can't afford to lose this catch, I already lost that scrawny squirrel.*

Shadepaw followed the mouse's scent, to shortly find it under a tree's root. Resisting to twitched her tail, she stalked forward. She waited until it emerged slightly from under the root. *Now!* Shadepaw leaped and landed square on the mouse. She killed it with a swift bite to the neck. She saw ginger fur at the corner of her eyes. It was her mentor.

"Shadepaw, let's go home so your catch doesn't get cold," Clovergaze yowled over the wind. Shadepaw followed Clovergaze with her scrawny mouse dangling from her jaws. Most of the cats were shivering in their dens when they returned.

The blizzard had died down, but it was still freezing. Shadepaw went to the medicine cat's den to place her catch on the fresh-kill pile. They always moved the pile in the medicine cat's den because it was the warmest den. There were only two other pieces of prey on the pile: a rabbit and a shrew. Shadepaw saw Addertail eating a small vole in her nest. "Join me," she invited, beckoning Shadepaw with her tail.

Shadepaw slowly padded over to her former mentor.

"You can have a bite, I know you might not eat anything besides this today." Addertail moved the vole closer to Shadepaw.

"The hunting patrols will be back soon," Shadepaw said stiffly, rejecting the vole.

Addertail shook her head. "You will eat now, the hunting patrols might come back empty-pawed."

Shadepaw scoffed. "You're not my mother," she hissed.

Addertail's eyes narrowed. "You better be happy I'm not," she sneered. "Last time I checked she gave you up for more kits."

That made Shadepaw flinch. Her fur brushed as she stomped out of the den, half blind with fury. She plopped down under the shade of her favorite tree and unsheathed her claws. Without thinking she sliced her claws down her foreleg. Pain pierced through her as her claws met her delicate flesh. Fresh blood dripped out of where she had struck. She took one claw and raked it down to make a fresh mark. The snow turned red as her blood stained it. Her claws were dripping with her own blood. She stood up, ignoring the pain she felt and the blood that dripped down. She saw Addertail looking at her in pure horror. She was aware of the stares her clanmates were giving her. She dismissed them and walked on, her tail dragging in the snow. She caught Robinheart's eye as she dragged herself into the apprentices' den. She plopped down, ignoring her pangs of hunger as she drifted off.

It was moonhigh when Shadepaw awoke. Carefully, she crept over the sleeping bodies of her denmates. Only a small amount of snow fell from the sky as Shadepaw padded across the clearing. Making her way to the dirtplace, she snuck out of camp. Shadepaw knew that Shatteredfang would be guarding tonight, and almost always he fell asleep on watch, so she wouldn't have a problem. Her black pelt helped her disguise in the shadows as she padded farther from camp. The blood on the wounds she created had dried, and it didn't hurt much now, but she knew they would leave scars. She thought of what Foxtuft had said about the rogues, which made her think of Eclipseheart. She felt a snarl forming on her face as she thought of the mangy rogue. *He knew about the attack all along!* she thought, a

sudden wave of anger rushing through her. *Why did I request he joined the clan?* Foxtuft was right, they should attack right away. Her mind slowly began to form a plan, one that would get rid of Eclipseheart while also destroying the rogues.

# Chapter 13

Shadepaw wished the three apprentices good luck before they left for their final assessment. Emberpaw had given her a hard stare while the two toms had thanked her. Thistlejaw was sending out hunting patrols and border patrols.

"Tinypuddle, Froststrike, Owlflight, and Duskwhisper, you will be hunting near the river, not the creek. If you can't find much, catch some fish." On rare occasions, MountainClan caught fish if the ice was thin and the prey was poor. He continued with the patrols, and when Shadepaw didn't hear her name or Clovergaze's, she sighed. She was probably going to search Hazelflash for ticks.

Her thoughts were interrupted by a high pitched squeal. She saw Snakekit diving under her paws for a ball of moss. She reared up with mock surprise. Snakekit stopped playing with the mossball and charged at Shadepaw. When he jumped on her, she purposely fell. "Oh, no! Spare my life this one time, I won't cross your path again!"

Snakekit's stubby tail was raised high as he growled, "Do you promise to return to your filthy twolegs?"

"I promise!" Shadepaw cried.

The little kit got off of her and scampered after the mossball.

Shadepaw tilted her head. Was the kit really trying to make her leave? She pushed her thoughts aside, and just as she was turning to find Clovergaze, Snakekit hissed, "Leave, you murderer," he spat. Shock pulsed through Shadepaw, but before she could say anything, Flowersting ran up to the little kit.

"Snakekit," she hissed. "How dare you say that to a clanmate?" Her pelt was bristling with a mixture of embarrassment and fury.

The kit flattened his ears to his head and growled, "Robinheart told me she murdered Eaglestar."

Flowersting's eyes widened with shock. "It's all a misunderstanding, it wasn't just-"

"You know very well that it was Shadepaw," an unfriendly voice interrupted. Shadepaw didn't need to look over her shoulder to see who had spoken. It was her mother. "Shadepaw delivered the final blow."

Flowersting looked uncertain for a heartbeat. "Shadepaw did what she thought was right."

Shadepaw dug her claws into the ground. She hated being reminded of the time she killed her leader. Narrowing her eyes to slits, she spun around, darting out of camp. The sour taste of Eaglestar's blood returned to her mouth as the memories of that dreadful night returned. She shook her head. Maybe a hunt would lift her spirit. She quietly lifted her nose, trying to catch a whiff of prey, but all she could scent was freshly fallen snow. She hissed in frustration. She felt her paws leading her to unexplored territory. Ahead of her was a wide open moor which no clan lived on. Cautiously, she placed a paw on the moor, outside of MountainClan territory. She slowly began to go completely out of the boundaries. It was like going into a completely different world, and she sprinted onward, leaving her clan. The snow made the usually green land white. Shadepaw nearly tripped on a rabbit hole, but strong jaws grasped her scruff. She let out a squeal as she was hauled back.

"Must be your first time on the moor," a voice chuckled, "cats who are born here never fall in rabbit holes."

Shadepaw turned around to see a solid ginger tom with a white muzzle and paws. His light green eyes sparkled with amusement. "Who are you?" she asked cautiously, taking a small step back.

"My name is Socks." He cocked his head and stared at me. "And you are...?"

Shadepaw was uncertain, but she replied, "Shadepaw."

Socks's gaze widened. "You're a clan cat?" Something changed in his voice, and it wasn't a good change. "I know some cats that might want to see you."

Curiosity got the best of Shadepaw as she began to follow the tom. He led her over to a hollow, there, cats were lazing around, and they all seemed somewhat familiar. She fought the urge to run as the tom led her into the clearing, where all the cats stared at her. She tried to keep her fur flat, but a she-cat leaped in front of her. "Socks, who is this stranger?"

In front of Shadepaw was a ginger she-cat, a familiar one. *I'm in the rogue camp!* She realized, shocked.

"She said she's a clan cat, one called Shadepaw," Socks informed, dipping his head to the muscular she-cat.

The she-cat looked at Shadepaw, her eyes narrowed thoughtfully. "I've seen this scrap," she announced. "She fights no better than a kit still suckling from its mother!"

Shadepaw flattened her ears as the cats around her broke off into a soft laughter.

"Amber, I saw her in the fight, I killed her weak father." Shadepaw's fur bristled as she stared at the one-eyed, dark brown tom, her eyes filled with hate and rage.

The leader figure called Amber didn't find that amusing, instead of replying, she turned back to Shadepaw. "What are you doing here anyway?"

Shadepaw forced her fur to lie flat. "I-I wanted to explore the moor."

"So you didn't know our camp was here?"

Shadepaw shook her head. "No, I didn't."

Amber sighed. "Sage, take her to the prison," she ordered, padding over to a tunnel.

A pure white she-cat took Amber's place. Without a word, Sage led

Shadepaw over to a tunnel. "The senior cats will discuss what to do with you," Sage mewed when Shadepaw went down in the tunnel.

Shadepaw shifted in the tunnel uncomfortably. "What do you think they'll decide?"

Her stomach churned as the white she-cat hesitated. "You're young," she announced at last, "they won't kill you."

What seemed like moons past until soft pawsteps stopped near the prison entrance. "We need the prisoner," Amber's voice growled.

"Y-yes, Great Leader," Sage stammered. Raising her voice she hissed, "You heard your master, get up!" The black she-cat rose to her paws and padded out of the tunnel, relishing the light. Now that she had a better view of Amber, she noticed a nick in her ginger ear, and her pelt was nicely groomed, only a few furs stuck up. Sage had bright blue eyes, and her pelt was very fluffy, with some scars on her body. Though her fur was fluffed, you could still she her ribs.

"Follow me," Amber snapped, whipping around, her tail hitting Shadepaw's face. Shadepaw let out a hiss of annoyance, but followed. She was aware of cats staring at her with curious eyes. Being her shy self, she quickened her pace. Amber led her into a well-built den, which was a decent size. Three cats were sitting in the den already, their tails neatly tucked under them. Shadepaw recognized two of them, one was Socks, the rogue who brought her here, and the other was the one-eyed brown tom that had killed her father. She shivered at the memory. The third, the one that was unfamiliar was grey she-cat with a lighter grey chest, muzzle, and belly. The she-cat had brilliant blue eyes.

"Amber, we have decided what we want to do," the grey she-cat announced.

"Dawn, last time you made a terrible mistake, how can I trust you now?" Amber asked, a growl rumbling in her throat.

Dawn's pelt began to slightly bristle, but her voice was calm as she said, "Scratch and I both came up with it." She nodded her head at the brown tom. "Socks approved of it."

The ginger she-cat nodded. "Let's hear it." Amber sat down and curled her tail neatly around her.

Dawn exchanged a glance with the two toms and nodded at them. Scratch stepped forward. "We let her return home, but with a message from us, so they know we aren't to be messed with."

Shadepaw opened her mouth to protest, but Amber slapped her tail over it. Shadepaw shot the older cat an irritated look. *You attacked us!* She wanted to yowl. "And the message is...?"

Socks took Scratch's place and looked at Shadepaw, "Our cats are as strong and loyal as ever, set one paw wrong and we'll march into camp and conquer it."

Shadepaw looked at the rogues with pure astonishment. "I will *not* deliver this false message! You will *never* conquer any clan's territory, though borders separate us, we are one!" she declared, her pelt bristling.

The rogue cats looked at her, their eyes sparkling with interest and respect. "You are one very feisty clan cat, and I appreciate that, but we are enemies and always will be." There was a regretful note in her voice. She turned to Dawn as she growled, her regret forgotten, "Escort this young cat back to her clan, and deliver the message yourself, don't get hurt." Without another word, Amber padded out of the den.

Scratch observed Shadepaw with his single eye for a heartbeat then fell back on his haunches. "You'd make a great fighter."

Shadepaw felt the urge to claw off his pelt, but she knew that would be the biggest mistake. "I'm a better fighter now than I was!" She hesitated before adding, "I can prove it."

Scratch said nothing, but his eye was shining with respect.

Dawn stopped between them. "Let's go, Shadepaw, before it gets dark." She padded out of the den, and with a final glare at Scratch, Shadepaw followed. The sun was sinking behind the mountain as they set off on the moor, heading to the forest. As they strolled on,

Dawn suddenly broke into a sprint. Shadepaw stopped walking and watched as she chased after a rabbit, slowly gaining on it. The grey rogue leaped and landed squarely on the rabbit, then snapped it's neck with a quick bite. She walked back over to Shadepaw and dropped the rabbit at her paws. "Eat," she ordered.

Shadepaw obeyed and crouched down in the snow. It was a scrawny rabbit, just enough to fill one cat, but she didn't want to hog it when she wasn't the one to catch it. "You can have some," she mumbled through a mouthful.

Dawn shook her head. "No, I already ate today, thanks."

Shadepaw finished the last of the rabbit and stood up. The two walked in silence until Shadepaw asked, "Are you a 'senior cat?'"

Heartbeats passed. "Yes, along with Scratch and Socks," she finally replied.

"Why did Scratch kill my father after your leader said to retreat?" Shadepaw forced herself to sound calm as she asked the question that had been nagging at her for quite some time.

Dawn stopped walking and stiffened. She let out a long breath and turned to Shadepaw. "Scratch did what he thought was right. We may have not exactly known what we were fighting for, whether it was for revenge for us being driven out of our home seasons ago, or just for fun, but we are loyal to Amber, our leader."

Shadepaw sighed and sat down. "I guess you're right, I would kill for my clan, too." She dug her claws into the snow. "I-it's just that I miss him, he saved my life!" Shadepaw looked back at Dawn. "I want you to come back to camp with me and take Eclipseheart away, punish him."

Dawn narrowed her eyes suspiciously. "Why?" she asked defensively. "Did you plan this so he could spy?"

Shadepaw met her gaze with the same ferocity. "Isn't that why you sent him to us?"

The she-cat lowered her blue gaze, giving her chest a couple of

embarrassed licks. "Er... well, that might have been the case," she muttered.

Unable to contain her laughter, she broke out laughing. "That's why Amber didn't trust you new plan at first, until you reassured her you looked it over with Socks and Scratch!"

Dawn flicked her tail crossly, not finding the topic amusing. "He reported to us a few times, telling us where to strike, telling us about weaknesses, until one day he stopped coming back. We thought he had been killed."

All laughter had stopped, and Shadepaw looked up at Dawn with serious eyes. "He betrayed you, the cats he was raised with!" she growled. "He can't be trusted."

Dawn nodded, starting to walk towards the forest again. "Exactly." Shadepaw followed Dawn once again.

Shadepaw kept her gaze ahead as she growled, "I will allow you to take Eclipseheart back to your camp."

# Chapter 14

The sun had sunk behind the mountain by the time Shadepaw and Dawn reached the camp entrance. The scents of her clanmates were strong as she heard Poppystar yowl, "All cats old enough to fight their own battles gather below to hear my words!"

Shadepaw burst through the entrance, followed by Dawn. The cats gathered beneath Poppystar stared in surprise at Shadepaw and Dawn.

voices began to spread in the clearing, and Shadepaw heard a few clearly. "Who is that cat?"

"I thought Shadepaw left for good!"

"Poppystar wont like the interruption."

"Quiet!" Poppystar yowled above the clamor. "Shadepaw, who is this stranger you have brought within our camp walls?"

Shadepaw dipped her head, trying to stop her legs from shaking. "This is Dawn, she wishes to bring home something her camp has lost..." her words were drowned out as cats began to protest. She caught Eclipseheart's eye, but he quickly turned away.

Poppystar raised her tail for silence. When the cats' voices died down she meowed, "Go on."

"Eclipseheart betrayed the rogues that attacked us, how can we

trust him?" she asked, her voice trembling.

"You wanted him to become a warrior," Rainflash pointed out.

Shadepaw acknowledged the comment with a flick of her ear. Unable to speak in front of the crowd anymore, she whispered to Dawn, "You should take over."

Dawn stepped forward. "Eclipse - excuse me - Eclipseheart was spying for my group. He told us your weaknesses, strengths, when to strike, how to strike, and much, much more."

Yowls of protest threatened to rise over Dawns voice.

"This no good mange-pelt deserves to be punished - for both of our sake," she finished strongly and sat back down, curling her tail neatly over her paws.

The yowls grew louder until no cat could possibly be hears above it.

Poppystar raised her tail for silence once more. When she could be heard, she meowed, "I never did trust Eclipseheart, take him back with you, I expect him to have a very severe punishment."

Eclipseheart stood up, his eyes flashing around the clearing wildly. "Poppystar, I'm loyal, very loyal, I promise you that!"

Poppystar stared down at him. "If you are loyal, go with your former campmate to your former home."

Dawn dipped her head. "Thank you for understanding, and I am deeply sorry about crossing your border."

Poppystar gave a brisk nod. "You may stay here til morning, but then I expect you to leave right away."

"Thank you."

The tortoiseshell leader turned back to the gathered cats. "Now, the real reason you are gathered is because three hardworking apprentices took their final assessments."

Cheers from the cats below greeted her words.

"Bramblepelt, is Dustpaw ready to become a full MountainClan warrior?"

Bramblepelt nodded. "He is."

Poppystar's warm gaze rested on Dustpaw. "I, leader of Mountainclan, call upon my warrior ancestors to look down on this apprentice. He has trained hard to understand the ways of your noble code and I commend him as a warrior in his turn. Dustpaw, do you promise to uphold the warrior code, even at the cost of your life?"

"I do," Dustpaw replied, his voice steady.

"Then by the powers of StarClan, I give you your warrior name. Dustpaw from this moment forward you will be known as Dustbreeze. StarClan honors your enthusiasm and strength, and we welcome you as a full warrior of MountainClan!"

Eventually all the apprentices got their warrior names. Emberpaw's new name was Emberwisp and Harepaw's was Hareskip.

"As you know, you will have to sit vigil until morning, and remember, you cannot talk."

The three new warriors nodded eagerly and dashed excitedly to their post.

Shadepaw gaped her jaws in an enormous yawn. Dawn was talking to Poppystar, so Shadepaw just went to the apprentices' den and fell asleep.

Three sunrises had passed since the three apprentices had become warriors. Eclipseheart had left with Dawn. Shadepaw rested under her favorite tree, grooming.

Suddenly, Dappleshine burst through the entrance, his side slowly dripping with blood. "Foxes... Emberwisp, Thislejaw and.... and Frozenpaw need help!" he managed to breathe out.

The cats panicked, looking for Poppystar to tell them what to do.

"Poppystar's out training Lostpaw!" Tinypuddle gasped.

Bramblepelt stepped forward, his fluffy tabby pelt speckled with white snow. "How many foxes are there?" he asked.

"Too many," Dappleshine replied, shaking.

"Me, Goldenspiral, Clovergaze, Shadepaw, Owlflight, and Softsong will deal with these foxes!" He ordered. "Dappleshine, lead us there."

Dappleshine nodded and sprinted out of camp, the patrol following. Shadepaw's paws fizzed with excitement as she followed her clanmates out of camp. When they arrived, Thistlejaw was getting thrown at a tree. He landed with a thump. Frozenpaw was in the jaws of a fox who was shaking her wildly. Two foxes had Emberwisp cornered at a tree.

Shadepaw launched herself on the fox tossing Frozenpaw around like prey. "Don't hurt her!" she shrieked. She barreled into the fox, and it let out a yelp of surprise, dropping Frozenpaw on the ground. The fox stumbled as it lost its balance, but quickly regained it. Shadepaw was aware of Clovergaze raking her claws across her flank. Frozenpaw had gotten up, although her neck fur was wet with her blood. Frozenpaw got the other side of the fox and was raking and cursing at it. The fox flung Shadepaw off of its back, and lunged at her. She felt it open the scar on her cheek. She cursed at it and clawed at its ears. She felt it take her scruff for a heartbeat, but then with another yelp, it dropped her and ran. Clovergaze and Frozenpaw had chased it off! Shadepaw looked around at the fighting cats.

There were only three more foxes. Bramblepelt, Owlflight, Goldenspiral, Softsong, Dappleshine, and Thistlejaw were attacking two foxes while only Emberwisp was aiming desperate blows at another. Shadepaw hurled herself at the fox, but only after it picked up Emberwisp by the hind leg. When she ran into the fox, it crunched down hard on Emberwisp's leg, who yowled in pain. Shortly after the fox realized it was alone, it released Emberwisp.

Shadepaw crouched beside Emberwisp, whose breath was shallow. "Emberwisp!" she cried, willing her former friend to open her eyes.

Slowly, Emberwisp's yellow eyes opened. "Shadepaw... I'm sorry," she rasped.

Shadepaw tried to see through the blurring in her eyes. "W-what for?"

"You thought... you... you did the right thing by killing Eaglestar," she mewed, her voice muted.

The black apprentice rose to her trembling paws when Emberwisp's stopped breathing, blood slowly trickled out of scratches across her belly and side. "Emberwisp, I'm getting Addertail!"

She was about to rush back to camp, but Goldenspiral blocked her. "She's dead, Shadepaw."

Shadepaw unsheathed her claws. "Get out of my way!" She hissed blindly lashing out at the warrior. She felt teeth meet her scruff as she was torn away from the warrior. With a wail she collapsed at Emberwisp's body, remembering their good moments as young apprentices and kits. "I will never forget you," she vowed silently.

When the patrol got back to camp, Poppystar and Lostpaw were back. Bramblepelt and Thistlejaw were holding Emberwisp's body on their shoulders. A long wail of grief came from Hareskip and Dustbreeze as they looked at their sister's lifeless body. Poppystar lowered her head respectfully to the body.

"Emberwisp!" A heartbreaking voice wailed. Shadepaw turned her dull eyes in the direction of the voice. Froststrike, Emberwisp's mother was running over to her daughter's body. "No, no, no, no!"

The two warriors carrying Emberwisp lowered her to the ground. Thistlejaw padded over to his mate and licked her shoulder. "Our daughter deserved a longer, happier life," he sighed.

Shadepaw watched as Addertail rubbed mint and lavender on Emberwisp's body, covering the scent of death. *So much death.*

Shadepaw laid down next to Dustbreeze, pressing her pelt against his. "I'm sorry," she whispered. She looked at Emberwisp's orange body. "May StarClan light your path," she breathed.

"It's time to bury her," Poppystar's gentle voice announced. It was the morning after Emberwisp had died, and Shadepaw had stayed up with Dustbreeze mourning for his sister. Their pelts were pressed together still, and even when Hazelflash, the only elder, placed Emberwisp's body in her grave, he didn't move. Neither did Hareskip. Shadepaw stayed to, both to comfort Dustbreeze, and she didn't want to leave the warmth of his pelt. She felt Dustbreeze begin to get up. He looked exhausted. Haresky had went to the warriors' den to sleep, but Dustbreeze still stood by Shadepaw's side.

"Follow me," she heard Dustbreeze whisper. She obeyed and followed him into the forest. Suddenly he stopped at a small tunnel, but after the short hesitation, he plunged into it. Reluctantly, Shadepaw followed.

"Where are we going?" She asked, uncomfortable being surrounded by darkness.

"Keep following, don't worry." Moments later they were in a large open space with a small amount of light coming from a tunnel leading outside. Three nest were in the center. "When we were apprentices, Emberwisp found this place, we made nests in it and occasionally slept here," he told her, his voice shaking with sadness as he mentioned his dead sister.

"This is impressive," she breathed.

Dustbreeze gaped his jaws in an enormous yawn. "You can explore later, now I just want sleep." He laid down in a nest and tucked his tail neatly over his nose.

Shadepaw picked the nest next to his and got close so their pelts brushed. She drank in his scent and closed her eyes, falling into a deep sleep.

A paw prodded Shadepaw's side. The black apprentice stirred,

opening her eyes to she the tabby face of Dustbreeze. She looked around, confused to find herself in a cave, but she then remembered Dustbreeze had taken her down in a tunnel. She sat up, her eyes fixed on Dustbreeze.

"I wanted to show you the twoleg place before we go back to our camp," he announced, getting to his paws. Shadepaw stood up and shook her pelt, getting rid of any scraps of bracken. She followed him outside. It was night - about moonhigh - and there was plenty of unnatural light coming from ahead.

"Is that the twoleg place?" she asked in awe. Her amber eyes glowed with amazement.

Dustbreeze let out a long purr. "Yea, come on!" He began to sprint, leaving Shadepaw to hurry after him.

Shadepaw felt the cold leaf-bare wind in her fur as she rushed after her brown tabby clanmate. "You'll regret that!" The lights got closer and closer until they reached a fence. She watched as Dustbreeze scurried over the fence. She followed and plopped down soon after. "Should we really be here?"

Dustbreeze looked at Shadepaw. "Are you scared?" he teased.

Shadepaw let out a sigh. "Someday you're going to get lost, exploring twoleg places and tunnels!" She followed him as he led her deeper into the twoleg place. The unfamiliar scents filled Shadepaw's nose, making her uncomfortable. The stone under her paws scratched her pads. She longed for the soft forest grass. The moon was slowly sinking and the stars were beginning to disappear. Shadepaw wondered if one of the stars was Pebbleclaw watching over her.

Suddenly Dustbreeze stopped and turned his head to the stars. "Emberwisp is among them tonight," he said in an unusually soft voice. Shadepaw stayed silent, not sure how to respond. Some stars shone brighter than others, but Shadepaw knew that all the stars were all equally important. *Do StarClan cats die?* She asked herself. "Let's find a place to sleep." Dustbreeze's voice broke through her thoughts. She followed him as he led her to a grassy clearing near a

twoleg nest.

"Is it safe to sleep here?" she asked, cautiously placing a paw on the lush grass.

Dustbreeze shrugged. "Don't know." He paused to smell the air. "I hope." The brown tabby plopped down to the grassy ground. Hesitantly, Shadepaw lowered herself next to him. She wasn't tired since she had recently slept, but it would be nice to get more sleep. The thoughts that whirred in her mind stopped when she fell into a troubled sleep.

# Chapter 15

"Who are you?" An unfamiliar voice asked, prodding Shadepaw with a paw. She let out a grumbled and slowly opened her eyes. In front of her was a plump grey tabby tom, his yellow eyes glowing with curiosity.

Shadepaw sat up, gaping her jaws in an enormous yawn, revealing yellow teeth. She looked over to where Dustbreeze had fallen asleep, shocked to see he was not there. Panic flared inside of the young she-cat. "Have you seen a brown tabby?" she asked quickly, "A nick in his left ear, strong body?"

The grey tabby sat back on his haunches. "You haven't answered my question."

Shadepaw let out a threatening growl. "My name's Shadepaw," she hissed in annoyance.

The tom let out a soft chuckle. "What kind of name is that?" He cocked his head. "Have you lost your housefolk?"

Shadepaw glared at the tom. "Excuse me, I am not a kittypet!" She spat, pelt bristling.

The tom just stared at her, his eyes lit with amusement. "Feisty." He then looked at her, puzzled. "Kittypet?"

Rage filled her voice as she hissed, "You're a stupid kittypet, okay? Just tell me where my friend went before I claw your eyes out!" As she opened her mouth to catch a whiff of Dustbreeze all she could smell was the horrible stench of twolegs.

Horror lit the kittypet's expression. "Are you one of those rogues?" His fur began to fluff.

"No, no!" She mewed, forcing her fur to go flat. "I'm just trying to find my friend. Have you seen him?"

The tom shook his tabby head. "Nope," he answered. "Anyway, my name's Stripes, yours is...?"

Shadepaw stared blankly at him. *He has a terrible memory...* With an irritated snort, Shadepaw began to walk away before she heard a familiar voice. "Where are you going?" Shadepaw whipped around and saw Dustbreeze carrying a fat pigeon.

Anger filled Shadepaw as she faced him. "Where were you?" she hissed. "You had me worried sick!" She raced over to him, brushing against him.

"Sorry, I didn't mean to frighten you," he mumbled, dropping the pigeon. "I caught this for us."

She looked over at Stripes who was looking at the two with amusement. "I'll leave you cats alone." He then disappeared in a flap in the twoleg nest wall.

When they finished the pigeon, they began to head back to camp. When they were in the tunnels, Dustbreeze asked, "What will you do when Robinheart's kits are born?"

The question took Shadepaw by surprise. "I don't know," she whispered.

"They'll be born soon, what if she acts the same to them?" he asked, turning down a different path in the tunnel.

Shadepaw flicked an ear. "I think she wanted kits to torture me, to tell them I'm a monster and to kill me." She shivered at the thought.

They finally got back into the forest, in their territory. "Finally, trees above my head!" he exclaimed.

Shadepaw chuckled. "Well, before we get back we should hunt, we've been gone for a day now."

Dustbreeze nodded. "I can't wait till newleaf is here," he muttered,

sniffing the air for prey.

"You won't have to wait long, the snow just needs to thaw," she pointed out. "There should be a mouse over there," she added, pointing her tail the direction of a tree. "Probably under the roots."

The tabby warriors eyes shone with admiration. "Well spotted," he purred, crouching. Shadepaw watched as he silently slid through the snow, heading for the tree. When he reached the tree he waited, and just as the mouse appeared he leaped, landing squarely on the mouse, giving it a swift bite to the neck.

"Nice catch!" Shadepaw lifted her nose to smell a familiar smell, but she couldn't quite think of it. "Hey, Dustbreeze," she called, still trying to discover the smell. "What is that stench?"

Dustbreeze lifted his nose, the mouse still hanging limp from his jaws. He then froze, his fur beginning to lift. He quickly scraped earth over his mouse and crouched, stalking forward. Puzzled, Shadepaw copied him. "It's BoulderClan," he hissed in her ear. Together, they crept into a bush, the strong stenchof BoulderClan around them.

"Let's get out of here, we don't want to get caught!" A new voice hissed.

"Calm down, Quietpounce, these MountainClan scum won't be checking their borders for a while now," A second voice growled.

"Redwater, I know you're deputy, but we could be spotted by a patrol, and there are only two of us," The cat called Quietpounce pointed out, her eyes darting side to side as if she expected a patrol to burst through the bushes.

The deputy let out an exaggerated sigh. "Fine, the squirrel and thrush should be enough for now."

Shadepaw felt a low growl rumble in her throat. She exchanged a glance with Dustbreeze, who flicked his tail, signaling to attack. Together, the two sprang out of the bush, Shadepaw getting Quietpounce and Dustbreeze attacking Redwater.

The two BoulderClan warriors shrieked as the MountainClan cats took them by surprise. Shadepaw managed to rake Quietpounce's ear. Quietpounce hissed in pain and ducked at Shadepaw's next swipe. Shadepaw felt claws rake her flank as the tan-and-white she-cat went to Shadepaw's side.

Shadepaw screeched and whipped to face the enemy she-cat. She dove under her belly and raked her claws across it. When the she-cat turned to ready herself when Shadepaw reappeared, but Shadepaw went the way she came from, surprising her foe. She scratched the she-cat's haunches before the muscular she-cat turned around, lashing out with a flurry of paws. Shadepaw put her forelegs up to protect her face, but Quietpounce opened a scar that was there. Shadepaw hissed and pivoted, striking the she-cat hard in the muzzle with her back paws, claws unsheathed. When the she-cat was stunned, Shadepaw leaped on her back and slammed her face to the ground.

"Retreat!" Shadepaw heard Redwater yowl. Shadepaw slid off Quietpounce. She fixed her eyes on the BoulderClan deputy. "Take your scrawny squirrel and thrush, we don't need it anyway!" Shadepaw didn't believe that. She could see the ribs of the BoulderClan cats clearly. *Should we let them take something?*

Dustbreeze kicked the plump squirrel towards the deputy. "Take it, I don't want to watch a clan starve," he growled. Redwater's eyes shone with disbelief for a heartbeat, but he then snatched it up and sprinted towards the border, Quietpounce right on his heels.

The two MountainClan cats watched as they retreated to their clan. "Let's go home," Dustbreeze sighed.

When they arrived back at camp the cats raced to greet them.

"Where were you?"

"We were so worried!"

"Never do that again!"

"You're bleeding!"

A loud yowl silenced the cats. "Silent!" Shadepaw saw Poppystar making her way through the crowd. "Shatteredfang, take their fresh-kill to the pile," the leader ordered as they dropped the mouse and thrush. Turning back to Dustbreeze and Shadepaw she asked, "Where were you?"

Shadepaw and Dustbreeze exchanged a quick glance. "Er... we went to explore the twoleg place," Dustbreeze admitted, looking at his paws to hide his embarrassment.

Poppystar's eyes shone with interest. "The twoleg place? Is that how you got those scratches?"

Dustbreeze shook his head. "No, we found a few stray BoulderClan cats on our side of the border stealing prey. They were half starved!"

The leader's gaze clouded with concern. "Are they fine?"

"We let them have the squirrel, but they know not to come back," Dustbreeze explained.

Poppystar nodded. "Good thinking." She turned around, heading to her den. "Dustbreeze, follow me," she ordered, not turning to face him. Shadepaw watched as the young warrior followed Poppystar into her den.

"Shadepaw, let me check your wounds." Addertail's voice ordered. Shadepaw reluctantly followed the medicine cat in her den, remembering the last time they talked which had not ended well. Shadepaw sat down as the medicine cat inspected her wounds. "They aren't serious wounds, let me just get some marigold, maybe some chervil."

Shadepaw flicked her ear at the mention of chervil. "I won't need it if my wounds aren't infected," she pointed out.

Addertail gave her a glare. "I knew that," she mumbled. For once Shadepaw noticed a few gray furs on her former mentor's muzzle.

"Wait, Addertail," she called just before the medicine cat went to the herb storage. Addertail stopped and looked at Shadepaw.

"What?"

"Let me heal myself, please," she begged, desperation creeping in her voice.

A soft laughter arose from the old medicine cat. "Fine, but don't make a mess," she purred.

Shadepaw let out a sigh of relief. She walked to the herb storage, inspecting her wounds. The wound on her flank was deep enough to get an infection. The opened scars on her foreleg were minor and would only need a few licks and then cobwebs. Shadepaw chewed up the marigold petals, turning them to a poultice and put it on her flank. Then, Shadepaw chewed up goldenrod and placed it on her flank. She wrapped her opened scars with cobwebs. She padded back out of the den to see Addertail treating Dustbreeze. He had a nasty scratch on his shoulder.

"Hi Shadepaw," he mewed.

She mewed a greeting and walked over to Frozenpaw who was sharing a mouse with her sister.

"...and then I leaped, landing right on the rabbit!" The two looked up at Shadepaw then quickly looked down. "Hi..." Lostpaw mumbled.

Shadepaw looked at Frozenpaw, her expression puzzled. "What happened?" She asked in a superior tone.

The pretty she-cat looked at her paws. "Er... when you were gone Eclipseheart - or now Eclipse again - swore to get revenge on you," she admitted.

"How'd he get out of the rogues' camp?"

Frozenpaw looked uneasy. "Well, he said he escaped."

Shadepaw felt her blood freeze. "Foxdung!" she hissed. Her claws dug into the ground. "We have to go after him before he hurts somebody!"

Frozenpaw stood up, her fur bristling. "If it weren't for you, he wouldn't be a problem," she snapped.

Lostpaw touched her stubby tail to her sister's shoulder. "Shadepaw did what she thought was right."

Frozenpaw didn't take fierce gaze off Shadepaw. "She invited him to stay in the first place, and then she just casts him out! How loyal!" Her lip drew back in a snarl.

Shadepaw thrust her muzzle in Frozenpaw's face. "You're nothing but a murderer!" she screeched.

"You killed Eaglestar too, mousebrain!" Frozenpaw hissed, lashing her tail.

"Do you regret it though?"

Frozenpaw's eyes turned to a cold fire. "No, of course not, if I wanted to, I'd kill all my clanmates!" she spat, launching herself at Shadepaw.

Shadepaw got knocked to the ground, but quickly recovered. Frozenpaw stood with her claws unsheathed, looking at Shadepaw with hungry eyes. The white apprentice launched herself at Shadepaw again, this time raking her flesh. A screech flew out of Shadepaw's mouth.

"Stop!" A voice commanded, pulling Frozenpaw off of Shadepaw. Shadepaw looked up to see the tortoiseshell leader, her eyes blazing with fury. "Control yourselves!" she hissed through Frozenpaw's scruff, who was still struggling madly.

Shadepaw stumbled backward, shocked. She watched as Poppystar dropped Frozenpaw on the ground. "Sorry," she heard the apprentice mumble as her fur lie flat.

Poppystar stood tall and cleared her throat. "Eaglestar never stopped fights like these, but with me as your leader they are unacceptable, do you understand?"

Cats in the clearing murmured in agreement.

Shadepaw still couldn't feel comforted. Behind the young apprentice's words had been something dangerous. *I'll keep an eye on her,* she promised herself. *I won't let her hurt a clanmate.*

# Chapter 16

A moon had passed since the incident with Frozenpaw, and life had been normal with the occasional glares from her mother, hisses from Softsong, and sharp retorts from Frozenpaw. The sun had just sunk behind the mountain. Shadepaw had hunted with her mentor. Newleaf had begun, already leaves grew.

A sudden screech made Shadepaw alert for trouble. Flowersting was herding her kit, Snakekit out of the nursery. "Robinheart's kitting!" she announced.

Addertail immediately raced out of her den, caring a bundle of herbs. Shadepaw wanted siblings, but not siblings that her mother would manipulate in believing she was evil. She sighed and lay in the shade of a tree. Softsong was pacing anxiously outside the clearing. *Pebbleclaw, what should I do?* She asked silently. She was suddenly aware of his scent, but she couldn't hear him speaking or see his shape. She was comforted by his presence.

When the moon had rose, a thin cry pierced the air. A loud boom and a flash of lightning followed. Time seemed to freeze. Two, lightning and thunder together after the kits were born. Thunder and lightning will rise with power! The kits must be the thunder and lightning, but how many kits were there? A shiver went up her spine. Did the sign mean the kits would destroy the clans?